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A FAITHFUL LOVER.

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VOL. III.

A FAITHFUL LOVER

BY

KATHARINE S. MACQUOID,

AUTHOR OF

“PATTY,” “DIANE,” “IN THE SWEET SPRING TIME,”

“BESIDE THE RIVER,”

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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BOOK THE THIRD.

(Continued.)

A FAITHFUL LOVER.

CHAPTER VII.

UNEXPECTED.

ESAU RUNSWICK felt more than ever confirmed in his theory that women were fruitful sources of trouble. Since Clemency had come to Hollow Mill the tenor of his monotonous life had been completely changed; some disturbing thing or other presented itself almost daily in connection with his niece's residence in his house.

He had said that it would be time enough to speak to Mr. Glaisdale when he

should renew the subject, but then he had wished Clemency to understand that this admirer was not one to be lightly set aside, lest he might not again present himself. Now he felt puzzled how to act. He knew that if the Squire spoke again, Clemency's direct truthfulness would spare him no jot of mortification in her refusal, and although he shrank with strong aversion from "meddling in the affair"—as he called it—yet he resolved, if possible, to warn Glaisdale. Esau had lived too secluded a life to have cultivated much insight, but a certain natural penetration told him that this man was vindictive, and that his seemingly careless ease was the manner of a man accustomed to have his own way in all things. It was more than possible that he would be deeply offended, and give Clemency up if she refused him; and although Esau tried to face this possibility, and told himself that he did not want

anyone to marry his niece to please him, yet he felt sure that so long as she and Ralph de Kerjean both remained single, he should never be left in peace. He would not allow himself to consider the possibility of allowing her to marry Ralph; the idea of being brought face to face with his false love, would have been a sufficient reason against it, even if he had not forced himself to identify Ralph with his father—the man who, in Esau Runswick's opinion, had crushed the happiness out of two young lives for his own selfish gratification. It was impossible that this man's son could make Clemency happy, even if he meant anything serious by his wooing. And this was the crowning argument with which he always silenced a certain inward pleading that Clemency's pensive face and changed quiet ways sometimes evoked.

Ralph de Kerjean he told himself had found time hang heavy on his hands at

Baxdale, and had amused himself with the girl. Doubtless he had forgotten her by this time; "if a simple girl like his mother could forget so quickly," Esau thought, "I have only done my duty as Clemency's guardian in delivering her from what might have caused her real unhappiness."

He was thinking this over as he walked up to the forge. There had been a high gale the day before, which had wrenched some iron fencing from its supports—he wanted the smith to mend them. To his surprise the place was empty, the anvil bare, there was no trace of the glowing fire that usually greeted a passer-by. Going round to the cottage he knocked. No answer came, and he knocked again; then a young girl with a tear-stained face opened the door a little.

"Peter's dead," she said, and she began to cry.

“Can’t I see your father?” Mr. Runswick remembered this was Peter’s sister.

“No, you cannot,” she said resolutely. “He’s seen t’ parson, an’ he’s seen Miss Phœbe, they knowed Peter, an’ they loved him, but you hev nivver coom to see Peter, what call hev you to take feyther from helping fettle t’ouse?”

The wild-haired child could scarcely speak for sobs, but she dried her eyes with her knuckles and looked doggedly at Esau.

There was nothing for it but to go away. He went on to the moor, and then he remembered he had not been this side since the day of his meeting with Obadiah; he shrank from seeing the boy again, though he wanted to see Glaisdale. He knew, however, that if he stayed long enough on the moor he must meet the Squire, he would be sure to cross it on his way either to Hollow Mill or Baxdale.

While he stood uncertain whether to go

any further, he saw some one riding across from the further end of the moor. It was not Glaisdale however; very soon he made out that it was a groom on horseback carrying a basket in front of him. The man touched his hat and stopped when he saw Mr. Runswick.

“I am going to the mill, Sir, to leave some flowers, but I have a note for you—”

Esau held out his hand for the note, and the groom rode on with the flowers.

Esau opened the note and read:

“Dear Mr. Runswick,

“I write to you instead of to Miss Ormiston, because she seemed, I thought, very much taken by surprise when I spoke to her. Business takes me away to London for a few days, and I think that before I return you will be good enough to assist your niece to understand that I was in earnest in what I said to her.”

Esau smiled. It seemed as if all was going according to his wishes, Glaisdale's absence at this time was a likely means to make Clemency regret him. He decided that the best way would be to write and tell him not to press for a decided answer from his niece at present, but to let things take their course.

“It is just the line he can follow I fancy,” he thought; “he has outgrown the impatience of a young man, and will make himself so pleasant, that very soon she will look for his visits, and miss him when he does not come.”

He felt soothed and hopeful on his way home.

As he again passed the forge, he saw Daniel Lister leaning against the doorpost. He looked downcast, sullen; even his beard was dull and tangled; all the bright colouring that characterised the man had departed. Mr. Runswick felt

more sympathy than he could have thought possible. He even went back and said, "I'm sorry to hear bad news, Daniel, the work I came about can wait."

"It mun wait till Ah've done t' job Ah hev in hand," Daniel said, "no one but his feyther shall drive a nail in t' lad's coffin."

Esau stood silent and awkward. He thought it was absurd of the blacksmith to do what the carpenter would doubtless have done much better, but he did not trouble himself to say so, he did not know how to say anything, and yet a certain softening that had come to him of late made him unwilling to go away in silence.

At last he said, "Your little boy suffered a good deal, did he not?"

"Yes, he did;" then with a groan, "but he nivver so much as pitied hissself. 'Twas allus t' Lord's will not hissself wiv Peter. Ah'm thinkin at t' Judgment Day he'll coom off easy," he looked in-

quiringly, almost angrily, at Mr. Runswick; his silence irritated him. He had been up many nights with his boy, and this morning he had not taken any food, he was weak and querulous, and it seemed to him that this sinner doubted the saintliness of his lost darling.

“What can ye know,” he said, “you who live wivout God; nobbut ye’ll find at t’ Judgment ’at ye’ll have to say why ye’ve lived for yersen as if t’ world was made for ye; t’ lad hev said a prayer for ye oft an’ many a time, nobbut ye nivver spent a thowt on him. Go yer ways an’ repent before t’ day of t’ Lord cooms—cooms,”—he pointed one crooked finger at Esau as he turned away, “for ’tis coomin like a thief in t’ night.”

“Poor fellow,” Mr. Runswick said, “he’s crazed with grief;” and as he walked away the sense of being magnanimous in not minding Lister’s absurd

outbreak quite overshadowed any effect the words might have produced on him.

As he passed the broken fence he said to himself, "it can wait till the lad is buried."

He had gone out much earlier than usual because of this fencing, and now he went straight to his study to read; he entered by the little door to which he alone had a key.

Clemency had been watching him from her window, and she ran quickly downstairs with a letter in her hand. The post-mark had set her heart beating, and brought colour to her cheeks.

"Uncle, uncle," her voice reached him just as he was going into his study. "Here's a letter, and the postman hopes you'll not be angry, he says the Monsieur on it and the writing put him out, and he took it to the Vicar, who sent him back here with it."

Esau's cheerful mood still lingered.

“Thank you,” he said, taking the letter, “the old fellow is almost past his work—more than half blind he tells me—have you had your flowers, Clemency?”

“Yes, uncle,” but she would not smile, “they are very beautiful.”

“Mr. Glaisdale has gone to London,” he said, without looking at her, and passed into his study with his letter.

Esau sometimes received foreign letters, but this handwriting was new to him—so small and pointed and delicate—it was no wonder that poor blind Paul the postman had not made out its destination.

Esau had no warning prevision, not so much as an extra heart-beat when he opened the scented envelope, but the first words “*Mon cher Monsieur Esau,*” brought a red flush to his forehead, and a veil came between him and the writing; he saw, as if he were dreaming, the words “*mon fils Ralph,* and *Mademoiselle votre*

nièce," then he turned the page, and he saw the signature surrounded by a delicate flourish, "*Toute à vous votre amie, Julie.*"

In an instant, almost as it seemed without his will, he had flung the paper into the fire.

Then he walked up and down rapidly, while his anger blazed up in a flame that obscured all attempt at thought. "How can she dare to write to me," he said at last. "She knows by this time what she has done for my life. She has laughed no doubt over her son's account of the poor old-fashioned recluse,"—he writhed as he thought how unconsciously he had revealed himself to Ralph de Kerjean,—“and now she ventures to dispute my will.”

Any reluctance he might have felt to press Glaisdale on Clemency was swept away.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MEETING ON THE MOOR.

DAYS have gone by. Mr. Glaisdale has been to London for a week on business, but he has returned, and he often comes to Hollow Mill.

At first Clemency is stiff and shy during his visits, and more than once she tries to avoid them; but the Squire devotes so much of his conversation to Esau Runswick, that little by little she has come to the conclusion that, however much her uncle may desire the match, Mr. Glaisdale has plainly relapsed into indifference. He no longer brings her flowers, and he has quite given up asking her to come to the

Manor House. The change is a relief, but she misses the flowers; her uncle has been so moody and silent again that life is becoming a weariness. Miss Phœbe seems to avoid her; there is no Peter to read to now; and she has not yet summoned courage to face Obadiah.

To-day her uncle takes her by surprise. "Clemency, Mr. Glaisdale dines here this evening." Then, noticing her disturbed look—"You need not trouble about it;" he says, "I have been talking to Lettice, and I find she can manage everything if we send to Flobay for fish."

Clemency sat wondering. She could not imagine how her proud uncle could make up his mind to expose the deficiencies of his household arrangements to Mr. Glaisdale. She was rather nervous as to Timothy's waiting, but she felt no enthusiasm about table decoration; and indeed the bryony had already got a touch

of frost and was no longer beautiful. Instinct told her that Mr. Glaisdale would disdain any such attempts that were not endorsed by fashion, and would consider them silly and out of place. Besides this, Clemency shrank from any effort to please Mr. Glaisdale, knowing well that her uncle would consider it a proof that she sought the Squire's admiration. She therefore contented herself with giving Timothy a few directions, and then went up to her room.

She had been with Daniel Lister in the morning, and had been deeply touched by the message of thanks left to her by poor little Peter, whose death had been sudden at last. Daniel mourned his loss deeply, and this was the first time that Clemency had been able to see him since his son's death, for he had gone away each time he saw her coming.

Even now he had not been able to talk

about his boy. "Ah give ye his words," he said. "An' noo, Miss Clemency, Ah mun stick to t' anvil."

She saw that he was afraid of breaking down, and she left him; but now she sat thinking how sad and dull the man's life would be. His wife had died years ago, and Annie was a wild, unmanageable child, who had never cared for anyone but Peter.

"Perhaps," Clemency thought, as she stood at her window looking down on the mill wheel, "if Daniel did not preach quite so much uncle might take to him, and they might help one another. The worst of Daniel is that he thinks he knows more about everything than anybody else does, and he wants every one to be good in his special way."

She did not often look out of this window. It reminded her of the happy days that seemed so long ago now—the

days that her uncle had broken into by inviting Ralph Kerjean to dinner.

While she stood looking it seemed to her that something moved among the pine trees. She opened the window and leaned out, but there was nothing to be seen in the wood, only the red boles of the trees looking blood colour in the level sunlight, and the blue-green pine needles in intense contrast. While she stood there she saw her uncle in the avenue, and she watched him mount the hill till he was out of sight.

She sighed and went back to her writing-table. What a time it was since she had written to Mrs. Butler or to Mary. She had felt that she could not write to them about Ralph, and since he went away she had been too idle.

“I suppose idle is the word,” she said mournfully, “but I cannot settle to anything. I seem to go from one thing to

another, doing nothing well. Peter did me good, he was so patient, and now there is no Peter.”

She liked best to wander round and round Miss Phœbe’s garden, feeling that Ralph had been there; but even this had lost its charm. She could never forget Ralph, but if he had forgotten her, her pride whispered that she would do well not to feed the remembrance that she cherished so fondly.

She turned from these thoughts and began a letter to Mrs. Butler.

But she felt strangely unsettled, and instead of writing her letter her eyes wandered to the pine trees. There certainly was something moving among them, but so deep in between the red stems that she could only make out a dark flitting shadow. What could it be? The thought of Ralph came at once, and then she checked it. He would seek her openly if

he really loved her. She turned once more resolutely to her letter.

“Much has happened to me lately,” she wrote, “which it would be easier to tell you than it is to write about. I should so dearly love to see you—tell me if there is any hope of your coming to Baxdale.”

She wondered, as she folded up her letter, that this idea had not come before, and she resolved to propose it at her next visit to Miss Phœbe. Mrs. Butler was comparatively a stranger to uncle Esau, and her advice would not be biassed by love or fear of him. It seemed strange to Clemency that first her friendship, and then her love for Ralph, should have taken away all her former happiness. It had spoiled her life with her uncle, and it had broken up her confidence in Miss Phœbe.

Formerly if she had been asked to choose between Mrs. Butler and Miss Phœbe she would have said that it was far

easier to confide in the spinster—but now something, she could scarcely define it, had come between them—and all these sweet out-pourings beside her friend's knee were over—Miss Phœbe was changed. But the natural buoyancy of the girl's nature was not crushed; she rose up from the writing-table, and as she smiled, the troubled look left her eyes.

“I have been a coward,” she said, “and I believe I have been proud, if I had appealed to that dear thing's love she would have come back to me—my trouble has hardened me—how could I forget Dorothy's maxim, ‘Love conquers everybody.’ I will go and see her.”

At twenty, one seldom loiters between making a resolution and putting it in practice, and Clemency was not long in getting ready and in starting to visit her dear old friend. But when she came in sight of the cottage she saw Sophy

leaning over the gate seemingly taking holiday as she gazed towards Flobay. This was a sure sign to Clemency that Miss Phœbe was not within.

“Is your mistress out, Sophy?” she asked.

The maid gave a start of surprise. She had seen Miss Ormiston up at the forge in early morning; what could she want up here again?

“Yes, Miss; she’s gone ever so far—to Flobay, I fancy.”

“Really; then you don’t expect her back soon?”

Sophy shook her head. She had been annoyed by her mistress’s uncommunicativeness.

“I’m sure I don’t know, Miss. A lad comed with a note, and Miss Phœbe went out with her walking things on, and that’s about all I can tell you.”

“How long ago was this?”

“An hour or so I should say, Miss. I never knew Miss Phœbe out so long at a time—no, never,” and her injured look deepened.

“I think I will come in and wait,” Clemency said; “I daresay Miss Phœbe won’t be away much longer.”

Sophy opened the gate, ushered her visitor into the parlour, and shut the door upon her. Clemency began to wish she had been less determined and had gone away without seeing her friend; everything in this room spoke of Ralph; some of his books lay on the table, and as she sat close to the latticed window, the sofa opposite still held his unfinished paintings. She felt a keen sense of pleasure at being surrounded by these things, and yet she shrank from it. Her love had been such a sudden discovery to Clemency, and then Ralph’s silence had so crushed hope out of it, that she shrank from

yielding herself up to the delicious dream that stole over as she sat. All her meetings with him rose before her, from that first time when she had seen him sketching under the rosemary bush. She well knew he had sat day after day in this window sketching little bits of foliage, and watching Miss Phœbe among her bees and flowers. Clemency rose up suddenly, to break the charm. The dream was sweet but very dangerous; it weakened her. She felt that Hollow Mill would seem drearier than ever when she went home. She opened the door and told Sophy that she could not wait any longer.

“Give my love to your mistress,” she said, and she went on to the gate. She gave a long look towards Flobay, and then she stood still; Miss Phœbe was coming along the road.

“My dear child!” exclaimed Miss Phœbe, as Clemency ran towards her.

“Dear Aunt Phœbe! it is so long since I have seen you. Are you tired? May I come in?”

Miss Phœbe did not answer. She had closed her eyes and was communing with herself.

“May I come in, dear aunt?” said Clemency.

Miss Phœbe opened her eyes quickly.

“Yes, yes, my dear child; what could I be thinking of.”

She held open the gate for her visitor to pass in, but the girl noticed that she did not express pleasure at seeing her. Miss Phœbe led the way into her own little sitting-room on the opposite side of the passage.

“It is strange I should have met you;” then she paused and said, “very strange,” and sighed.

Clemency began to feel impatient.

“Aunt Phœbe, you have got some-

thing on your mind," she said; "you had better let me have half of it; it will make it ever so much lighter for you," and she put her arms round her friend and kissed her.

"Yes, my dear."

Then Miss Phœbe untied her hat-strings, and put her hat on the table beside her with a sigh of relief, as if she had been walking in summer heat. "I have a message for you, but"—she paused and looked at Clemency—"I am not sure whether I ought to give it."

Clemency's heart seemed to leap with joy; she knew that the message must be from Ralph de Kerjean. She knelt down beside her old friend and clasped her arms round her.

But Miss Phœbe, instead of yielding to her caresses, drew herself away, and her face grew more and more piteous in expression.

The girl's heart was touched. She rose up, seated herself beside her, and then she tenderly stroked the withered troubled face.

At this tears rolled down Miss Phœbe's cheeks, and Clemency wisely left her in peace.

Presently she leaned forward.

“What is it, dear,” she whispered; “you'll tell me, won't you?”

Miss Phœbe looked into the dark pleading eyes, and then she was conquered; she could not resist the imploring glance that met hers.

“You always did have your own way with me,” she said, “ever since you were a little one, Clemency; but I think you are good, my dear child.”

She was looking so anxious as she said this that Clemency could not help a mischievous smile.

“Aunt Phœbe, I won't answer for my

goodness if you keep me in suspense; I feel capable of any amount of naughtiness."

Then she knelt down again beside her and whispered, "Tell me, darling, what is it?"

Miss Phœbe pressed her lips together and looked up at the ceiling.

"My dear, Mr. Ralph wishes to speak to you;" then, hurriedly, "Clemency, dear, he said it was only this once—that he would not try to see you again—or I would not have consented; but he seemed so determined, and so—so miserable, that I thought——"

Clemency stopped her by the tenderest kisses.

"You are doing quite right, dear Aunt. Were you coming down to the Mill to tell me this?"

Miss Phœbe looked frightened, but Clemency's fixed gaze compelled her to answer.

"No, my dear—no indeed. I told Mr.

Ralph that when I saw you I would tell you, but I did not pledge myself to any time when—when you might meet.”

Clemency had risen, and she looked as if she wanted to go away.

“But then, Aunt, I don’t understand. Did you mean Mr. de Kerjean to go on waiting till I came?”

“He would not do that, my dear. He said he should stay on at Flobay till he saw you. When he left me he was going to the beck beyond Hollow Mill.”

Clemency nodded. “I know—in the glen between the moor and the sea.”

Then she hugged her old friend tightly. “I don’t know how to thank you, it is so kind and good of you—all the more good because I know you don’t half think it right.”

Miss Phœbe returned her kiss, but she sighed. She could not feel happy, and

yet it had been impossible to refuse Mr. Ralph.

When Clemency found herself on the moor she hesitated. Ought she to go and meet Ralph after her promise to her uncle? But then her uncle was trying to entangle her with Mr. Glaisdale, and it was possible that Ralph might have heard of the Squire's visits to Hollow Mill. Then she thought of Ralph's love, the longing to see him grew—a longing mingled with a shy shrinking that she had never before felt. She stood still, thinking.

“I will go,” she said at last; then, smiling, with a little laugh, “I believe my legs would take me there whether I will or not; but as soon as I come back I will tell uncle Esau what I have done; though I am not sure,” she said slowly, “that he has any right to separate us, unless he has a better reason than his own caprice.”

The nearest way to this glen, through which the beck took its course towards Flobay, was across the waste ground near the moor. As soon as she reached the gate leading to the avenue she turned to the left and began to cross the waste. At the bottom of this she came to an opening in the stone fence, and after passing through this and crossing two more fields, she found herself on the open moor beside the beck, a tributary of the river that ran by Hollow Mill. The brook was bordered here and there by trees, but these were almost bare of leaves, and though the day had been full of sunshine, the cold wind blew keenly, and seemed to promise rough weather. Farther on, the moor came down-hill as if to take breath before it rose abruptly to meet the top of the cliffs that border Flobay, the trees here were thicker, and some grey boulders fretted the course of the beck. Instinctively Clemency guessed

that Ralph would be found in this more secluded spot, and she began to climb up towards it. The moor was especially lonely here; not even a cottage, or a glimpse of one, was to be seen. The only sound was the constant struggle of the water against the stones in the beck close by—though this was overpowered to-day by the splash of the waves, as the wind flung them violently against the cliffs near Flobay.

Clemency looked among the trees as she reached them, and she saw Ralph. An oak tree had parted into twin trunks near the ground, and made a protecting screen, and he was standing half hidden between it and the brawling beck.

As soon as he saw her he came forward, and took her hands in his.

“You are so good to come,” he said; “but I thought you would come, dear girl.

I thought it would be useless to try and see you near the Mill."

"It would be quite useless."

He had drawn her close to him, and was gazing with fond delight into her sweet face.

"When I found that Miss Phœbe declined to give you the letters I had written, I felt I must see you, even if I waited outside Hollow Mill till we met. I have been waiting, dearest Clemency, ever since I left you, for an answer to my question."

His arm was round her now, and though her heart fluttered till it seemed to beat in her throat, Clemency felt at peace. She hid her hot face on his shoulder.

"Did you need an answer?" she whispered.

Bending down he kissed her.

"You mean that I ought to have

guessed your answer. Ah! my Clemency, you don't know what an unbeliever I am, or how often you will have to satisfy me that I really have your love; it is hard for me to believe that so sweet and good a girl can really care for me."

He spoke ardently, and pressed her to his heart. Clemency drew herself a little away.

"I shall not allow you to doubt me," she said saucily, though her eyes swam with tenderness; "it is because uncle Esau doubts me that we disagree, and yet if he saw me now, he would say his doubts were just."

"He has forbidden you to meet me then?"

"Yes."

They stood silent for some minutes, too happy to look an instant beyond the present; then Ralph said, "Your uncle

has no right to spoil our happiness. You will meet me again, dearest?"

Clemency shook her head. "I cannot."

"My darling, you must listen to me—you really must. If you are willing, there is no reason why you should not be my wife. I cannot let you stay at Hollow Mill to be shut up and ill-treated by that strange man. If I may not see you here, you must come to Askholme, and my mother will love you dearly."

Clemency closed her eyes. This vision of happiness was too delightful to be real. To be always with Ralph, and to be sure of his love; then with a quick revulsion she thought of her uncle, and how, as Lettice had taken good care to tell her, he had changed all his habits, had disturbed his whole life to take charge of her.

"I am thinking of uncle," she said, when she saw that he waited for her to speak.

Something in the simple truth of her face and manner thrilled Ralph through with keen sympathy.

“Did you tell your mother about that evening?” she said timidly; “did you find out from her any reason why my uncle should send you away?”

“Yes, I spoke to her, but her explanation does not justify his behaviour; you shall judge.”

He told her the story in a few words. In his heart he felt that his mother was not blameless, but he did not say so to Clemency; he screened her under the plea of having been entirely over-ruled by her parents.

Clemency listened with rapt attention—her eyes swam with tears when he ended, and she did not speak for some minutes.

“Poor uncle Esau,” she sighed. “Now I understand all his suspicion and his

hardness. I thought it was because my mother displeased him by her marriage; but now I see. Oh! yes, I understand. How sad his life has been."

She had drawn herself away from her lover, and she was looking pensively at the little beck as it churned itself into snowy foam in its passage between the old grey stones.

Ralph took her hand in his.

"My darling, be reasonable; Mr. Runswick's life need not have been sad if he had not shut himself up away from everyone."

"It was enough to make him unhappy," Clemency said sadly. "Think how terrible it must be to be deceived by one you love. If I were to forget you in a few days, and marry some middle-aged rich man, what would you do?" She had nearly said, "Marry Mr. Glaisdale," for at this moment it struck her that the two stories were rather alike.

“I should not behave as your uncle did; instead of giving you up, I believe I would make you keep to me in spite of every one; and you would keep to me, you would, my own sweet love.”

He had again drawn her close to him, and was looking down into her eyes with a fondness of expression that made Clemency feel as if her heart were going out of her. Her whole being seemed fused into Ralph's, and she felt that she had no will but his, while their eyes were telling the love of each to each, and their lips met in one long fervent kiss.

“Come with me now,” he whispered, “my love, my darling!” And while she felt his heart beating strongly against hers, it seemed to Clemency that she had no power against the strength of love like this. “Come,” he said, tenderly, and he drew her a few steps onward.

Clemency could not think : Ralph seemed

to fill her heart and her brain ; but when she had drawn herself away from him, and had begun to walk beside him towards Flobay, she roused.

She raised her head and looked timidly at her lover. "I must go back," she said. "Surely the best proof I can give that I am true, is by being true to uncle Esau. He trusts me now against his own will—I am, as it were, on trial—if I desert him I shall entirely crush his belief in women." Ralph took her hand and tried to speak, but she went on : "I can't tell you how I feel it," she said, earnestly ; "I have been thinking him hard-hearted. How wrong I have been ! I thought he never knew what it was to love, and instead of this his whole life has been spoiled because he has loved so well. Yet if I had remembered, at first, when I came back to the Mill, I made up my mind that he had had a sad life. Are you not sorry for

him?" she said, for Ralph stood still, and she thought he looked displeased.

"I am sorry for myself," he said. "Ah, Clemency, you love your uncle better than you love me! you are ready to sacrifice my happiness for his."

He looked at her reproachfully, then the love that her true eyes showed calmed him for a moment.

"You think me better than I am," she said gaily. "Don't give me too much credit—I only say, *now* I am going home to Uncle Esau, and I shall tell him I love you——" he tried to interrupt her, "wait," she said, "I am also going to tell him I won't marry you without his consent."

"Then you give me up," he said, passionately, "for that will be the end! and Clemency, my mother says he will never consent: he will persuade you to marry some one else."

He, too, thought of Mr. Glaisdale, though he knew she did not like him.

“Unbeliever!” Then she went close up to him and took his hand in hers.

“I believe in uncle Esau,” she said, her whole face lighting up with the fervency of her words. “There is more good in him than he knows himself. There is nothing mean, nothing trifling in him, and I believe he is generous, though he hides his good thoughts from himself. Let us trust him, dear. Surely when he knows how his whole life has been saddened by being robbed of his love, he will not put the same sadness into ours: he cannot; we have only got to be brave and patient for a little while.”

Ralph did not answer. His mother had given him the same advice to be patient; but the disappointment of losing Clemency now that he was sure of her love was too hard to accept.

“Perhaps I ought not to say that,” she went on, after a timid glance at him—puzzled too by his stern face. “Of course I ought not to expect you to wait for me, dear—you are free—you must not waste your life for a silly little girl like me,” her voice faltered, and then she went on, “only I shall go on loving you always—even—even ’—she whispered, for Ralph’s arm was round her now—“even if you marry somebody else.”

She had nearly conquered by her sweetness, but this took away his self-control.

“No you do not love me,” he said, sternly, “words mean nothing. Show me that you love me. If you will not come with me now, promise me that when my mother writes you will come to Askholme. It is hard enough to leave you here, but if you will promise that, I will be satisfied.”

“I cannot promise, dear Ralph;” he looked so hard, so cold even, she thought, that her heart sank; “I cannot promise that,” she said, pleadingly.

He felt as he looked, his nature was in revolt. She had balked his love and his will, and although he loved her dearly, he had no ductile softness about him.

“You must promise,” he said. “Why will you hesitate between me and your uncle if you really love me? He does not deserve your devotion; he does not love you, or he could not make you unhappy: and you sacrifice me to him—you do not love me.”

If he had looked less stern, she would have tried to soothe him—but she did not feel sure enough of his love. She felt frightened, and he did not understand her.

“I must consult him,” she said; “he is the only father I have ever known.” Then

she tried to say, "only trust me," but she felt that tears were ready to come with the words, and she stood waiting.

"I have made a mistake that is all," Ralph said. Then he looked at her for a moment.

Clemency tried to speak ; but she knew that only consent would satisfy him, and while she hesitated he turned and walked rapidly away.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. GLAISDALE AT THE MILL.

TIME had flown while Clemency stood with her lover beside the noisy beck, and when she reached Hollow Mill she found that there was scarcely time to dress.

Even if she had been less disturbed she would not have cared to look attractive this evening; but she was startled by the change she saw in herself; she looked radiant with loveliness. Her eyes shone, and every line of her sweet face was eloquent with tender, pathetic love.

As yet the joy of her meeting with

Ralph triumphed over her separation from him. She had known that they must be for a time at least parted, and she would not realise that her lover was really angry, or that being angry he would not forgive. Her chief thought at present was that he had said he loved her. "He loves me," she said softly, as she went down the staircase—a white vision in the gloom. She found the study filled with flowers from the Manor House, and while she bent over these, Mr. Glaisdale came in with her uncle. She received the visitor more cordially than usual; her uncle, too, was more genial, and his manner, and Clemency's smile, made the Squire think that he might throw aside some of the restraint he had lately exercised over himself towards her.

As he talked to-day, his eyes grew expressive, and his whole manner softened, till more than once Clemency felt as if she

must check the warm admiration he made no effort to conceal. A large fern in the centre of the table hid the girl's face from her uncle, and to him it seemed that matters were progressing as he wished. Presently Mr. Glaisdale said, in a louder voice, "You will let me bring a horse over for you, to-morrow, Miss Ormiston? I have had one in training for weeks past: she is just what you will admire."

Clemency smiled. Yesterday she felt that this would have been a temptation.

"You are very kind, but I will not ride, thank you."

Mr. Glaisdale was troubled; but this was only maidenly coyness, he told himself; if he were wary she would soon listen to him as he wished.

"At least," he said, "I will send Fatima over for you to look at; I fancy she will prove irresistible."

"You are very kind," and then as she

looked at him, a warm flush rose on her face, and her eyes were instantly turned away.

It has the effect of burlesque, or caricature, to see the expression that on one face has filled us with joy and rapture, repeated on another that has no power to arouse our sympathy. Mr. Glaisdale's eyes had in that instant told Clemency that he loved her ardently, and she shrank from the avowal with something like disgust. She felt puzzled how to act; there was an eagerness in his look, and this joined to the increasing warmth of his manner, made her fear that it would be impossible to check him without exciting remark; it might even provoke rebuke from her uncle, before she had been able to confess her meeting with Ralph. This fear made her feel sick and giddy, and she scarcely knew what the rest of the dinner-talk was about; she was only conscious of a feverish longing to get away.

Clemency left the table as soon as she could. When she rose from the table, Mr. Glaisdale rose too, and opened the door for her.

“I am longing to hear you sing,” he said, as she passed him, and he gave her another tender glance.

“You will not hear me to-night,” she said, coldly. “I am a little hoarse.”

She looked at him steadily, and went away with a quiet dignity that surprised and pleased him. This little girl, as he had accustomed himself to call Clemency, had suddenly grown older. She had lost her shyness, and she behaved, in fact, more as he wished his future wife to behave. She was charming beyond expression. He drank off a glass of wine hastily, and scarcely answered Esau Runswick’s next observation.

“Shall we not join Miss Ormiston?” he said presently.

Esau got up from his chair, secretly amused at his visitor's impatience. He, too, had been struck by Clemency's beauty this evening, and had ascribed it to excitement caused by the Squire's presence.

"She is coming round," he thought. "She has made herself look as well as she can for him."

Clemency was not in the study when they entered it. Mr. Glaisdale moved about restlessly; when the door opened he looked round, but it had only opened for Timothy.

Timothy went to Mr. Runswick and said in a low voice that Miss Clemency had a headache, and had gone to lie down; she hoped her uncle would excuse her absence this evening.

Esau was very angry. Only ten minutes since she had left them looking full of health and brightness.

“Go and tell Miss Ormiston I hope she will be able to come down presently,” he spoke so sternly that Timothy was glad to get quickly out of the room.

Glaisdale had this afternoon sent some lovely plants and flowers over to Hollow Mill. One of these, a Cape jessamine in full blossom, stood on Esau’s writing-table. The Squire bent over it and pinched a creamy blossom off between his finger and thumb, then he began to pull it slowly to pieces.

“I am sorry for this sudden indisposition,” he said.

“No doubt it will pass,” said Esau, stiffly.

The Squire was irritated out of all self-control; he had resolved to speak to Clemency, and his self-will broke out.

“They managed better in the old days,” he said, with a sneer, as if he were speaking to the torn petals; “then a young

lady's will was not consulted. Her father or her guardian presented a husband, and the matter was settled."

"I thought you preferred to speak for yourself," Esau said, in the mocking tone that jarred Clemency.

"So I do, but there is something here I don't understand; it seems to me that Miss Ormiston has played fast and loose with me to-night. In France they bring up young girls better."

Esau turned away suddenly. He felt his temper rising.

"Do they?" he said.

"Yes; only the last time I was at the club, a man was talking to me about French marriages. He said the girls are often kept in the schoolrooms till the marriage is arranged; there is no chance of any previous attachment; it is all a matter of course. By the by," his tone changed into sudden sharpness, "I believe your

niece rambles about the moor as she pleases, does she not?"

"Why should she not do so?" Esau asked, haughtily.

"You mean that every one knows who she is. But we have had strangers here lately: young De Kerjean for instance. Miss Dawlish told me he was an artist. He is nothing of the kind; I heard all about him at the club. He is a man of some standing; owns a good deal of land in Leicestershire, and I'm told his mother is one of the prettiest widows in England."

Esau writhed, but he did not answer.

"If there was any flirting with him," Glaisdale went on angrily, "it would be better to tell me at once. I certainly do not intend to put myself in competition with anyone else with regard to Miss Ormiston."

"You had better wait till you are asked to do so."

Glaisdale was silent. He was vexed with himself for having spoken of Ralph. He had never seen him with Clemency, though he had seen him look at her in church. He had felt then that his suspicions were groundless, and now he had let his jealousy get the better of his judgment.

“Come”—he spoke in the easy, careless way that suited him best—“I must say you spoil your niece, Runswick. I only know that if I were guardian to a young lady, and she deserted her post in this way, I should go to her room and tell her she must come down.”

Esau had thought of doing this very thing, but he would not do it to please Glaisdale now that he had offended him.

“It is just possible you said something that has annoyed her,” he said drily. “At your age you ought to know that women have caprices, and must be humoured in

them. I don't pretend to much knowledge of women's ways; but in my opinion my niece is best left to herself."

Glaisdale looked put out, and though his host exerted himself in conversation, he could not get over the restraint created by the Squire's manner. After some desultory talk about farming and the prospects of the hunting season, Glaisdale went away.

"You owe me a visit," he said, as he and his host stood at the hall door together. "When will you bring Miss Ormiston to the Manor House? I will send the horse over to-morrow."

There was something almost defiant in his tone, and Esau looked keenly at him as he got on his horse.

"I will bring her when she is willing to come," he said, then he looked round, but Timothy was out of hearing; he felt he had been hard and abrupt. "Make your mind

easy my niece shall marry you. Good night;" then he nodded, and Glaisdale rode away.

Esau did not go back to the study; he stood a few moments bareheaded in the cold night air, and then he went straight to the staircase. He had scarcely been to Clemency's room since she came to Hollow Mill; but now he went up the dim stairs, and groped his way along the passages, till he reached the door of her sitting-room. He had taken her part against Glaisdale because he had not chosen to be bullied in his own house; but he was not going to submit to this treatment from Clemency.

"Come in," she said, in answer to his knock; and going in, he found her sitting before the fire.

She made a charming picture; she had put on a long, white-frilled dressing gown; the shaded lamp stood on a writing table at the other end of the room, so that the

background was indistinct; but her face and her white gown showed plainly in the fire-light, which glistened, too, on the buckles of her little slippers, as she stretched out her feet to the blaze, and leaned back dreamily in her low wicker chair.

At first she thought it was Anne, the maid, and she did not turn her head, but in an instant she knew her uncle's firm footstep.

"Uncle!" she jumped up, startled. Then she saw the anger in his face.

"Please sit down," she said, and she offered him a chair. "I should have come to you if you had not come to me; I must have spoken to you to-night; I could not sleep without."

"Clemency, you were not ill; it was a mere excuse for your absence." He stood looking at her, and taking no notice of the chair she offered.

"I was thoroughly upset, and you will understand me when I have told you

why." She stopped. "Uncle, please sit down," she said firmly.

He stared at her in surprise—he, too, saw the change that Glaisdale had seen; she was quiet, but she had lost the frightened manner that used to irritate him.

He sat down almost against his will.

Clemency knelt on the floor beside him, and took one of his hands in hers.

"Uncle, I have seen Ralph de Kerjean to-day," she said.

He started and tried to draw his hand away, but Clemency kept it firmly clasped. In that moment she felt that she had a claim to be listened to.

"He asked me to meet him on the moor, and I went. I know that this makes you angry"—for he had pulled his hand roughly from hers and had turned away—"but I have not acted wrongly, uncle, it was better for me to see him—now it is settled;" she drew a long breath,

“I have told him that I will not see him again, and that I will not marry him without your consent.”

There was silence. Mr. Runswick still kept his head turned away. Clemency rose up and stood before the fire.

“You are very angry,” she went on as the silence continued; “and you wish me to marry Mr. Glaisdale, because you think he is a good match, and you think I am ungrateful. Uncle, I would do all I can to show you I am grateful; and more than that, I love you quite apart from any mere gratitude.” He moved restlessly in his chair. “I know you don’t believe me, you think that I ought to show my love by obedience.” She checked herself; she longed to remind him of his own love-story, to ask him not to sacrifice her as he had been sacrificed. But she could not do this—he had not confided in her—she could not force herself into his sorrow.

“Uncle,” she said, in a low, tender voice, “I love Ralph de Kerjean.” As she stood with her back to the fire she felt that her face was in deep shadow—besides, Esau was not looking at her. “Can you really wish me with my heart full of this love to encourage another—another man—to think even of marrying him. It would be sinful,” she said proudly. “Tonight I saw that Mr. Glaisdale cared still for me; I had thought he was cured; when I saw this it was surely best to keep away; I should only have mortified him if I had stayed, and I should have vexed you.”

“You have vexed me,” he said; “you have been much to blame.” His voice was so husky and choked that it seemed a long way off. “You ought to have checked this fancy in the beginning. You won’t tell me that you loved this young fellow the first time you saw him.”

Clemency stood thinking.

“I don’t know,” she said, dreamily; “I have thought about him ever since I first saw him, but I was not sure I loved him till he spoke of his love for me.”

Again there was silence.

“And do you suppose a man like that will wait for you? I tell you that he will forget you. Do you mean to keep single all the best part of your life for love of a man who will probably forsake you?”

“Yes.”

“Fool,” he said in his heart, but he was silent.

“Uncle,” she said presently, “I see you do not believe that a girl can love faithfully. If I have been so true to you, that I give up Ralph for your sake, and will not even see him again, why should I not be true to him? You say, will I keep single? I do not want to marry unless I marry Ralph. How can I swear to love another man when all my love belongs to him?”

“You talk nonsense,” he said impatiently. “You think all this sounds well, and you fancy yourself a heroine,” he shrugged his shoulders impatiently, “why, you don’t even know whether this young fellow is not trifling with you—whether he means honourably by you at all.”

Clemency’s figure stiffened, and her eyes shone with an angry light. “Uncle,” she spoke impetuously, “you are unjust. He offered me a home with his mother; he said, she would at once receive me as a daughter,”

Mr. Runswick turned round and looked at her curiously.

“Why did you refuse?”

Clemency squeezed her hands together. It was very hard to control her impatience.

“I have told you,” she said gravely. “I said I could not break my promise to

you, and I would not grieve you by disobeying you.”

She moved a little aside. She saw his face as the fire light fell on it—it twitched uneasily, she fancied; but as she looked more closely the sternness came back.

“You have done this, and what did he answer?”

Clemency’s eyes drooped. “He was angry,” she said sadly.

Esau Runswick mused. “Did you part in anger?” he said.

“Yes. Now, uncle, I have something else to say. You must let me leave you, for a time, at least. All this has been very, very painful, and I want to get away from Mr. Glaisdale. I have thought it out this evening since I came upstairs. I can go to Mrs. Butler’s; she will find me daily pupils, or some way of earning a living.”

Esau Runswick rose from his chair.

“You mean”—he spoke still in the

same choked voice—"that because I will not allow you to have your own way, Clemency, you refuse to stay with me! If you can give up this young fellow you can just as well let things be. Probably in a year's time you will find yourself as fond of Mr. Glaisdale as you are now of Ralph de Kerjean. I do not ask you to love the man now; I do not press anything; marry him after a time, and you will be fond of him when he is your husband—it is always so with women—Clemency, I have lived more years in the world than you have, why should you fancy yourself different from other women. I tell you that you will hear no more of De Kerjean. In regard to Glaisdale I am content to wait. You boast of your obedience, and yet the only thing I ask you to do you refuse."

He moved to the door, but she followed and put her hand on his arm.

"I don't think obedience means that

uncle. I am sure love is something one can't help; it is like a gale at sea—it comes suddenly, and it leaves everything different. Do you know I don't feel a bit like the Clemency I used to be? I love you, uncle—I must always love you; I will give up my happiness sooner than I will grieve you, nothing can change that, but you have no right over my love for some one else. Love cannot be forced—it comes of itself to every one. It may be God's will that I should give it up; but—forgive me for saying so—I think you speak like a tyrant.”

He looked at her in silence for some minutes: he started slightly at her last words, and his lips moved tremulously; then shrugging his shoulders, he shook himself free from the hold she had laid on his arm, and passed out of the room.

CHAPTER X.

ALONE AT NIGHT.

THE bell of the old clock on the stairs had a weird, awful sound as it struck the hour into the thick darkness that lay on everything; even in day-time there was something very solemn and unearthly in its tone, but to-night, each hour as it struck seemed to break with louder sound into the deep silence—as if the old clock knew that the house had gone to sleep, and that it was sole possessor of the darkness round it.

The house was not all asleep. Clemency had cried sadly when her uncle left her, for she felt that her sacrifice had been

thrown away, and that she had ended by quarrelling with him as well as with Ralph. She slept soundly now, though her cheeks were flushed, and her eyelashes clung together with the tears that had fallen on her pillow.

Esau Runswick was not asleep. He was in his study; in spite of the deep stillness he did not notice the hours as the old clock tolled out their passage. He did not notice either that the logs on the hearth had burned themselves to a black and white heap, or that the room each moment grew colder. The lamp, too—impatient, as it seemed, at being kept alight so much past its usual time—looked dim and sulky; but Esau was insensible to every sight and sound, standing in his usual attitude, one elbow on the mantelshelf, and his head resting on his hand. Perhaps if Clemency could have foreseen how deeply her parting words would have

wounded him she would have hesitated before she spoke them.

He had said them over and over again—

“It may be God’s will that I give it up, but I think you speak like a tyrant.”

A tyrant—yes, that was what she called him—and every time he repeated the word he learned his own love for his niece. After all, she did not love him much, he thought; she could give up her own will to God, but not to him. But so much had been said to disquiet him since morning that his thoughts did not concentrate themselves only on Clemency.

He recalled Glaisdale’s words about French girls, and he sneered—“How little he knows.” Julie was still in her schoolroom, and yet she had learned to love.

“Bah!” he said impetuously, “Julie never loved me; she played at it. Clemency is another sort of woman. I have

learned to-night how a girl can act when she is bid give up her lover."

But Julie's image had found entrance, and would not be displaced.

"The prettiest widow in England," Glaisdale had said.

She was pretty still! It was plain that she had not suffered sorrow to mar her charms. All at once, he could not have said how it came, he saw the two together—Julie and Clemency. He was angry with both, bitterly offended, and yet they had acted so differently. He tried to turn away from this view of Julie's conduct, but it would not leave him; it was there, forcing itself upon him with powerful significance. She had acted towards him as he wanted to make Clemency act towards her son. Was it from revenge he wished this? Esau recoiled a step or two, as if he had seen a fiend on the fireless hearth. "No, in God's name, no!" he murmured. "She

has harmed me enough; but I could never wish harm to her or to him—her son!” It was a new sensation to think of Ralph as Julie’s son; Esau had always identified him with his father. But this question pressed him pitilessly. He had called Julie false and deceitful, the two failings he most despised, and yet he had tried to force Clemency to forsake Ralph de Kerjean—why had he done this——?

“‘Because you are a tyrant,’” the clear young voice said; “you have no right over my love for someone else. Love cannot be forced; it comes of itself to everyone.”

Esau had to walk up and down the room trying to shake off this memory. He turned his thoughts to De Kerjean.

How was the young fellow to blame? He had fallen in love with Clemency, and she with him, not knowing this secret. But Clemency’s words, or rather those

that now came with the words she had spoken were too vivid to be forgotten.

She had hinted that he was selfish. "Who does not live for himself?" he said; "every one does in some way or other."

He knew so few people that his thoughts went naturally to those around him. Glaisdale lived for himself; he had plainly shown it this evening. But what of Clemency; he could not say the same of her. He knew how she had tried to please him, how she had tried to live his life, and adopt his habits; she lived, too, for her poor friends, and for Miss Phœbe.

Miss Phœbe herself!—A flush of shame tinged his dark cheeks—he knew well enough how kindly the poor lady thought of him, and yet he had grudged her even a kind look or word.

"You are a tyrant," the young voice said again.

Well, he would try to be kinder to Clemency. She had sorrow enough before her; Ralph de Kerjean was certain to inherit his mother's inconstancy; but something about him betrayed pride, Esau thought, and he would not be likely to forgive Clemency's rejection. For it seemed to Mr. Runswick a great matter, almost beyond belief, that this young fellow, whose love he had held so lightly, should have come all this way to seek Clemency. It was not likely he would forgive. Possibly, Esau thought, with a smile of satisfaction, he had heard of the Squire's courtship, and the girl's refusal would confirm any suspicions that might have arisen, and this comforting thought stilled the awakening which had been effected by Clemency's eyes and by her words.

"I am working for her future happiness," he said doggedly, and he turned a resolutely deaf ear to the misgivings

which had held him prisoner; and rousing to sudden consciousness of the gloomy room, he went up stairs, confident that Glaisdale would make a better husband than any younger man could for Clemency.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. PICKERING AND THE VICAR.

THE dinner hour at Baxdale Parsonage was six o'clock—but the Vicar's custom was to come into his wife's room some time earlier, so that he might tell her parish news, and report sick cases and other matters before dinner—and Mrs. Pickering always dressed early in order to be ready to receive him. When she was free of gout she sat up at her writing-table in the bow-window ready to take notes when necessary; but when her enemy had possession, a smaller table was pushed up to her sofa. Ill or well she never

spared herself from anything that she considered Duty.

To-day she was not very well, but she sat at her table adding up the accounts of the village clubs. Christmas was not very far off, and its doles and accounts, and the worry it entails on persons of responsibility lay heavy on Mrs. Pickering's soul. She never discussed her husband to herself; he was her husband, and therefore all she had to do for him was her fitting portion as his wife; she rather gloried in her labours, and considered that her talents would not have found scope in another position; but she was convinced that excellent as Mr. Pickering was, he could no more have kept the parish going without her help than he could have turned the course of the river rushing along at headlong speed on its way from Hollow Mill to join the Esk near Abbeytown.

The Vicar, as befitted a man of very

moderate capacity, considered womankind from a superior position. His wife was at the head of the parish, that alone would have ensured distinction for her, but he fully recognised her superiority to all other women, to all other English women, on the ground of having been born in Yorkshire; to all Yorkshire women, on the ground of being herself Julia Pickering.

Sometimes—for weaknesses must be owned—Mr. Pickering looked forward to these before dinner-chats with some sinking at his heart.

He was more tender, more indulgent than his wife was; weaker she told him, and more easily imposed on, and when he had been listening, with sympathetic face and word, to some tale of sorrow, or perhaps of imprudent love, Mr. Pickering's ears were apt to redden, and his chin had a way of sinking on his broad waistcoat as he

turned his steps towards home. To-day he was singularly pensive; and though the wind had risen as it grew dark, and he had turned up the collar of his coat to protect his ears, yet he walked very slowly along the road that led from Flobay to the Vicarage.

When he came into the study—Mrs. Pickering called her room the study, and her husband called his sanctum the library—he began to poke the fire vigorously, almost as if he were out of temper with the coals, and Mrs. Pickering, who with all her shrewd business qualities, had not a fraction of sympathetic insight, begged him not to give himself so much trouble; “the fire is burning nicely,” she said, “and does not want poking.”

She was too full of a new plan for buying blankets to feel that something was on her husband’s mind, and as he kept his face turned from her, she had not

much chance of finding out that it looked perplexed.

He listened with little interest to her scheme, and when dinner was announced, he was silent and quite unlike himself; and at last Mrs. Pickering became aware that something unusual was the matter, and though while the servants waited she enquired after the health of every one she could remember, as soon as she was left alone with her husband she looked at him fixedly.

“I don't wish to be inquisitive, Jerome, but I know you have something on your mind,” she said.

He gave a sigh of relief; this was one of the special ways in which his wife suited the Vicar, as, some one says, “a key fits a lock.” She extricated his thoughts and saved him the trouble of producing them.

“Not exactly on my mind,” he said,

“but something remarkable, I may say quite unexpected, has occurred.”

He rose up from his chair and stood in front of the fire with his back towards it. “Yes, very unexpected;” he smiled, “would you like to guess, Julia, which young woman of our congregation is going to be married?”

“Married!” Mrs. Pickering’s eyebrows rose and her lips closed tightly, “Is that all, my dear Jerome. Marriage is a natural outcome of life, especially of country life; in the country a man has so little chance of escape if a girl makes up her mind to have him; please give me your arm as far as the drawing-room, my foot is not easy.”

Mr. Pickering felt that he and his story were for the time dismissed, but when he had dutifully placed his wife on the sofa, he made another attempt.

“This is a different sort of case, my

dear, the gentleman lives at a distance and has come back to seek the young lady of his own free will."

Mrs. Pickering's face was rigid in its severity.

"You are talking about Clemency Ormiston and the young fellow who lodged with Miss Dawlish. My dear Jerome, you never see below the surface, I suppose you are too good, but you can hardly suppose Mr. de Kerjean has come back without invitation."

The Vicar did not look abashed, he was unusually eager to speak, determined to justify himself by telling his story.

"Yes," he said, "no doubt; it seems they were engaged before De Kerjean went away, but Mr. Runswick would not hear of it, he sent this young fellow to the right about, and forbade meetings or correspondence."

Mrs. Pickering sat thinking. She was so sure that Esau must be wrong in all he said and did, that Clemency's foolish love-story took a more sensible aspect in the light shed on it by his disapprobation.

“De Kerjean tells me,” the Vicar went on, “that he wrote to the young lady, and that Miss Phœbe would not deliver his letters. I confess,” the Vicar smiled, “I hardly expected so much decision from Miss Phœbe. The young fellow got tired of waiting, and he came over to-day to try and see Clemency Ormiston.”

“And has he seen her?”

“I expect he has by this time. I met him on his way to the moor, he wanted to see Runswick also, but he seemed doubtful whether he should succeed.”

Presently Mrs. Pickering said, “I do

not understand why Mr. Runswick objects to such a marriage.”

The Vicar's serene face lost its confident expression. “No, I don't make that out either, De Kerjean seemed to evade this fact, he said first that there had been a quarrel years ago between his people and Runswick; and then he said he believed her uncle did not want to part from Clemency.”

“That's all nonsense,” Mrs. Pickering spoke decisively, “you know, Jerome, as well as I do, that Mr. Runswick is trying all he can to marry her to the Squire.”

“There's not much trying needed on one side, I believe,” Mr. Pickering said slyly, “Glaisdale goes constantly to Hollow Mill; and more than once I have met the groom riding there with flowers; it seems to me possible that Runswick may prefer to marry his niece to our Squire.”

Mrs. Pickering shook her head, no one but herself ever could give the correct solution to any puzzle.

“It is not that only, that strange man will always run counter to every one else, you may be quite sure if the girl had preferred Mr. Glaisdale, Mr. Runswick would have set himself against the match. Do you suppose Glaisdale knows of the girl’s attachment?”

The Vicar shook his head.

“My dear, how can I tell. I only know what De Kerjean has told me. If you ask me, I hardly think Glaisdale would care to marry a girl who prefers some one else.”

Mrs. Pickering gave a sort of grunt. “That is supposing she does prefer him.”

The Vicar’s scanty eyebrows rose till his amiable pink forehead presented a series of curved mouldings.

“But, my dear, you did not, I think, understand. Miss Ormiston has engaged herself to De Kerjean, she would not have done this unless she preferred him.”

Mrs. Pickering sat suddenly upright, the movement pained her foot, but she was resolute in endurance, it was exasperating that a man with her Jerome's intellect should be so easily deceived.

“You really should study girls, Jerome, more than you do; in your position it is necessary to understand their minds and ways. I don't say that Clemency Ormiston is worse than other girls, but she has more provocation to be so. Just consider the girl's life, and she is naturally saucy and eccentric, her behaviour showed that when she was a child. She lives shut up from morning till night with that tyrannical old hermit, and it is only

natural that when young De Kerjean is out of the way, she should amuse herself with Mr. Glaisdale."

"Oh, my dear Julia!" the Vicar looked pained, he had a great liking for Clemency, although he had only exchanged a few words with her, and Miss Phœbe's warm praise had deepened the interest created by the girl's charming face and manner.

"You need not look shocked, Jerome, I am not talking scandal," said Mrs. Pickering with dignity, "one often hears of such a case, a man gets led on to the very brink of marriage with a girl, and then is thrown over for someone else. I dare say this will happen to our Squire."

The Vicar looked still more grave; he had such implicit faith in his wife's judgment that he could not disbelieve her, besides, had she not truly said that he

knew very little about girls. He clasped his hands behind him as he stood on the hearth-rug, his chin sunk on his chest, and as he rocked backwards and forwards in his perplexity, he seemed in danger of falling into the fire behind him. His wife left him to himself, she knew that he must have time to ponder her words.

At last he broke out suddenly :

“If you think so, Julia, you ought to speak to the girl yourself, it would do a great deal of harm if a proud man like Glaisdale were exposed to this kind of mortification. He might take a dislike to this part of the country, and forsake us altogether ; this would be serious.”

“No, I cannot speak to her, I don't know Clemency Ormiston ; if Miss Phœbe were less of a doll, she is the proper person, but she doats on the girl ; you should speak, you are her clergyman, and

yet—” Mrs. Pickering surveyed her husband critically for a few minutes, and then she shook her head sorrowfully. She decided that she would not advise him to take Clemency under his guidance. “There is another way,” she said.

The Vicar looked up eagerly. “What is that,” he cried, “I—I could not speak to Runswick—don’t ask me—”

His wife laughed. “Nothing so terrible, my dear; I will speak to Mr. Glaisdale; I will tell him that Mr. de Kerjean openly talks of his own engagement to the girl, and then at least our Squire will know what he is about.”

But the Vicar still looked pensive and unsatisfied. “Yes, he ought to know what is going on,” he said; “only I should be sorry to get that sweet girl into any trouble with her uncle.”

His wife gave him a superior smile.

“I believe, my dear, you still think

that girls are made of 'sugar and spice, and all things that are nice.' I am mistaken if there's not much more spice than sugar in your 'sweet Clemency.' ”

CHAPTER XII.

SORROW.

PEOPLE say, "Sleep on it; do not decide until this strange, deathlike part of existence has acted on the throbbing nerves, the over sensitive and wounded affections or the angry temper, the sorrows and trials of every kind, the stings that silly words from a foolish person will create in a well-ordered mind." But though this is doubtless good advice, it does not always happen that morning light finds the ruffled spirit appeased. Peace may be in the waking glance that greets the light, but, as the soul settles itself into its material habitation again,

and stretches its pinions, while every faculty rouses to meet the toil and burden of the day, often the vexations that sleep has lulled, rouse up also in even fresher vigour, and spread like some thick smoke-cloud over the lofty purposes and generous impulses that soothed us into quiet sleep.

It is possible that this happens when only feelings have come to help us in the struggle with our mental disturbance. If we begin to clear a foul pond, the first efforts make the water infinitely more discoloured than it was before; and until we have thoroughly accomplished our work, it may seem as if we had done more harm than good.

Esau's first feelings were sweet and peaceful; his heart seemed to go out to Clemency, and then came back almost at the same moment the remembrance of his promise to Glaisdale.

It must be kept. He went to the window and looked out; the sky was red, for the sun had scarcely risen, and the glow gave a strangely weird look to the leafless trees on this side of the Hollow, for Esau's room was in the part of the house where Clemency had slept in childhood. There were no pine trees beside the river or the narrow stream till both had passed the ruined wheel below Clemency's window, at the angle of Hollow Mill.

Esau told himself he meant to make Clemency happy; there would be more safety in trusting her to a tried man who had settled down into a steady, quiet life, than in letting her marry a young fellow, half a Frenchman too, who might tire of her and break her heart. Esau smiled at this last idea.

“A sort of book notion; women's

hearts don't break," he said, "though I believe Clemency has a true heart, and that she will make Glaisdale a good wife when she thinks less of this other fellow."

It was mortifying to feel that if Ralph had not met Clemency yesterday she would have behaved in a quite different way to Mr. Glaisdale. Still she had acted uprightly in making her confession to him, and though she had called him a tyrant, her uncle had no resentful feelings towards her; he heaped them—and they had come back in a mass this morning—on the heads of Ralph and his mother. From what Clemency had said, it was evident that they wished to steal her from him, and this conviction helped to sweep away the tender thoughts of last night. Yes, want of heart in a woman was sure to develop into worldliness, and Julie, he felt sure, had become a heartless woman

of the world, and her influence would ruin Clemency.

The more he tried to fortify his resolution of keeping faith with Glaisdale, the more ingenious he became in finding good reasons for so doing; and when he met his niece at breakfast, he was in an almost fatherly mood, conscious that he was acting solely for her good.

The girl looked pale and downcast, and her uncle saw that her eyelids were red.

She was very silent, and even when he spoke to her with unusual kindness of tone, she scarcely smiled; but he answered him so gently, and her whole manner was so subdued that he was touched.

At last she rose from the breakfast table. "I am going on the moor, uncle, to see Obadiah Sleights," she said.

Mr. Runswick felt surprised, she was not in the habit of telling him her pro-

ceedings; but he was glad she had not told him what she was going to do defiantly.

He thought she must have good courage to meet Obadiah. He shrank from ever seeing the lad again.

“Will you go with me later for a walk along the cliffs?” he said.

“Yes, thank you, uncle,” and she went away.

Esau was more troubled than he had been before breakfast; there was something unnatural in the girl's gentleness this morning; the sparkle and playful charm of her manner had departed. She seemed like some subdued creature from whom all the buoyancy of youth has fled.

Till to-day Esau had not known the spell that her brightness had cast over his life; she had been wilful, defiant even, towards him, but she had never been un-

feminine, and he had always known that it needed only a few kind words from him to bring back her sunny sweetness. It seemed now as if a word would bring tears instead of smiles ; but he hardened himself against all yielding, he must take care of her. He must watch her and see that she got plenty of fresh air—air, he knew was good for the nerves, and he supposed all women had delicate nerves—in other ways he determined to leave Clemency to herself, to avoid all explanations, and after a while to take her again to Thorpe Manor House. However lightly he might think of Clemency in contrast with others of her sex, he could not give up the idea that luxuries, and the beauty of outward surroundings, were powerful pleaders with any woman.

Meanwhile the girl had gone out ; she felt a longing to be alone and away from

Hollow Mill. Since last night her room had become still less homelike; she had made her last appeal to her uncle, and it had failed. Well, she asked herself, as she walked briskly up the avenue, why did she not go to Madame de Kerjean?—she would not marry Ralph till her uncle consented—she had only to write and she would be gladly welcomed at Askholme.

“No,” she said, “that would be following my own way. Uncle Esau would not, and cannot, make me marry against my will. I have only to be patient, and all must be right.”

But even after she had tried to fling her cares away—and it must be owned that the breezy air and the elastic heather on which she trod, did much to help her efforts—still her disappointment remained. She was cruelly disappointed in Uncle Esau. Last night he had been as much overwrought as she had been; she had thought

that a strong nature like his would be slow in coming round after such agitation, and yet this morning when he met her he seemed happy, and more at ease than usual. Her sympathy divined the truth; he did not believe in her constancy; he meant to force Mr. Glaisdale on her.

“I must go to Mrs. Butler,” the girl said, sadly; “if Miss Phœbe would but ask her down to Baxdale, she would help me through so many dark places.”

She felt very shy at the coming interview with Obadiah, but still she was unwilling to leave the lad to himself. Daniel Lister had told her he was ill, and that the mother craved to see her.

There were few red leaves left on the bilberry, though some blackberry sprays were gorgeous in colouring, red and gold seemed burnt into the leaves, but these were getting rarer every day on their long,

thorned arms. It was still so early in the day that dewdrops hung pearl-like on the webs stretched from bush to bush; but the grass-hopper's chirp was hushed, and there was scarcely a sound astir on the moor.

Clemency had keen eyesight, and she saw Obadiah seated in his usual place long before she reached the cottage. She felt that she reddened as she went up to him.

He looked in her face at first boldly, and then as he met her eyes, his own fell, and he seemed ashamed. It was a relief to Clemency to see Sally's pale face above Obadiah's dark head.

“Eh? Ah'm fain to see ye, Miss Ormiston,” the woman said, “t' lad cannot eat nor drink, he misses ye.”

Obadiah looked sulkily at his mother, and Clemency asked how Tom was; but after a few more words, Sally brought

out a chair for the lady, and saying she was "ower throng wi' ironing," she departed.

Clemency had felt very angry with Obadiah, but as she saw how pale and thin he had become, she softened; a way seemed open to her.

"I am very sorry you have been ill," she said, gravely.

The lad winced and crouched into his chair; he felt the coldness in her voice. There was a silence; then Obadiah quivered all over; his poor, thin face twitched, and his hands grasped at the sides of the chair.

"Ah willed no harm to ye," he said, huskily, "Ah'd a grudge agen yon gentleman."

Something in his tone struck Clemency, and she looked at him.

His eyes were fixed on her with a kind of pathetic appeal, his lips were parted

as if he could not say what he wanted to say.

“And yet he had done you no harm; I did not think you were spiteful, Obadiah.” She had not meant to allude to this subject, but the words seemed to utter themselves without her will.

“It wur’n’t spite,” he said, doggedly. “He wur a bad friend for ye an’ for me, an’ nobbut it angers ye, ah wur reet in cooming atween ye.”

Clemency looked very grave. “Hush,” she said, “you don’t know what you are talking about. You can never do any wrong thing without doing more mischief than you intend; it is always so, and in this case your wrongdoing has made me very unhappy; the end will be that I shall go away.”

“Away from t’ Mill?” His eyes opened as widely as they could, and he put out one hand as if he were going to catch at

her gown and prevent her from leaving him.

“Yes, Obadiah; I will try and come to see you once more, but this is uncertain, after that it may be long before I come to Baxdale again.”

His fingers had closed on her skirt like a vice, and a deep flush rose behind each prominent cheekbone, while his eyes glowed darkly.

Then he checked himself suddenly, and let her go.

“Ah'm a fool.” He looked away across the moor, “She cares nowt fur my sufferin', nobbut she cares fur ivverything, birds an' catjugs an' a'!” he muttered.

Clemency did not catch his words.

“Look here,” she went on, brightly, “you must try and take care of your poor mother; try and be unselfish to her. I'm afraid she's very delicate; if you could get her out in the air sometimes when she has

those headaches it would be better for her than staying always inside the damp cottage. Now good-bye."

She held out her hand as she rose, and Obadiah took it in both his, then as she nodded and smiled, and tried to draw it away, he pressed it to his lips.

Clemency patted his head. "Poor Obadiah," she said kindly, as she turned across the moor.

The lad clenched his hands, but as long as she was in sight he kept his eyes fixed on the pliant, graceful figure; then when the tall furze bushes hid it, he jerked his head violently back against the door just behind his chair. His face contracted with the pain the blow gave him, but he instantly repeated it with yet more violence. At the sound he made his mother came out.

"What is it, Obadiah," she said, anxiously.

“My head,” he answered sulkily. Then, seeing her reproving look, he broke out, “An’ who nobbut mysel hev t’ reet to clout mah head fur me. Mebbe Ali’ll do’t agen; ye can gan indoor to yer wark.”

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. PICKERING'S LUNCHEON.

THERE was more sympathy between the Vicar's wife and Mr. Glaisdale than might have been expected. Mrs. Pickering, like some other women, fond of laying down laws for others, had a great idea of prestige; she did not trouble herself to inquire into Mr. Glaisdale's literary capacity and judgment of books or music, or his ideas on the special topics of the day; but he was the only near neighbour who spent every season in London; who knew "everybody" there, and was sure to be at every party worth going to. He

was unquestionably fashionable, and therefore he must be the best authority on all worldly matters. If he recommended her a book written in slipshod English by some fast and fashionable lady he knew, Mrs. Pickering always sent for it, and if she found herself unable to discern its merits or its morals she decided that this arose from the fact of her living out of the world; she would not imagine that Mr. Glaisdale's opinion on such a subject could be faulty, though on matters relating to Baxdale, to Thorpe, to Christmas comforts for the poor, and such matters, she lectured him freely.

To-day she had asked him to luncheon with the full intention of opening his eyes with regard to Clemency Ormiston. It never occurred to Mrs. Pickering to doubt her own judgment on purely moral subjects; on religious topics she deferred to her husband, and the world was

represented to her as an authority by Mr. Glaisdale; but she certainly knew how women, more especially young women, should behave, and could discern the motives of their conduct. Still there remained another question, the manner in which her visitor might receive her communication. She was sure that Mr. Glaisdale would utterly throw himself away if he married the niece of Esau Runswick, but Mrs. Pickering's long upper lip straightened, and she nodded her head doubtfully as she reflected on men and their folly when a pretty face was in question.

Even her good, pious husband could not bear to listen when she sat in judgment on Clemency Ormiston.

“I shall have to be careful,” she thought, as she heard her visitor ride up to the front door. “If I mention it abruptly, and he is so foolishly in love

as Jerome says he is, he might be off like a hot chesnut."

And when he came in, no one could have detected a purpose in the pleasant face with which she welcomed her guest.

The luncheon was excellent, for Mrs. Pickering never allowed ill-health to be an excuse for careless housekeeping; and her servants were well trained. She took great care to wait till her guest had eaten and drank well before she began her story; indeed she left the Vicar to entertain his host; out-door topics, as she said, being just those on which she possessed little practical knowledge, still she said some amusing things.

"I am glad to see you so much better than usual," said Mr. Glaisdale, with great apparent interest.

"Yes, thank you, I am much better than usual; and bodily health affects the spirits; but my casual and spasmodic

observations cannot be compared with those of, for instance, my husband. He actually lives out of doors; takes in nature and her aspects all day long, you may say, insensibly."

Mr. Glaisdale smiled.

"If that was a general rule, peasants ought to be idyllic. Yet, I suppose, you would hardly find one of them with any love of nature."

"If Miss Dawlish were here," said the Vicar, "she would say you talk treason. According to her we have more than one poetical-minded villager in Baxdale."

Mr. Glaisdale was bored. The lower classes were to him inferior clay; it was absurd to ascribe to them feelings and ideas of which they were incapable.

But he smiled as he answered the Vicar; it was far too much trouble to discuss such a subject.

“Dear Miss Dawlish; she is too good for this wicked world.”

“Yes, poor thing. I wish she were a little wiser.”

Mrs. Pickering spoke in the emphatic tone, which always made her husband uncomfortable. He loved his Julia, and thought her far above the rest of her sex. But he sometimes wished she would not be so direct and incisive; would leave things in an indefinite misty way to develop themselves, instead of dragging them so inexorably into daylight.

“Must all ladies be wise?” said Mr. Glaisdale. He saw that Mrs. Pickering’s words held “a clue that would wind,” as Yorkshire folks say, and he was curious to see how she would produce her meaning.

“You mean that they cannot. You are right; but they should never under-

take to advise others who also want wisdom."

"I always thank heaven that I'm neither a lady nor a parson," said the Squire, laughing.

Mrs. Pickering's fair face flushed a little.

"I don't mean to say Miss Dawlish preaches," she said. "The Vicar thinks her excellent, and I dare say she is, but I don't think she has been a wise friend to Clemency Ormiston?"

She darted a rapid glance at him, and he saw it, and being far more of an adept in concealing his feelings than Mrs. Pickering was, he looked as indifferent as possible.

"Is Miss Ormiston in want of advice then?"

He looked at her so lazily out of his handsome blue eyes that Mrs. Pickering felt aghast. To her literal mind it seemed

impossible that this man could be in love with Clemency.

“ Well, I don’t know ; I am very much puzzled about her. I am no friend to Mr. Runswick, and yet I think that if a girl accepts the shelter of her uncle’s home, looks on him as her father, and so on, she is bound to study his wishes. Now it is said that young Mr. de Kerjean, who was lodging with Miss Phœbe, quarrelled with Mr. Runswick, and that the hermit forbade him his house.”

She paused here, for Glaisdale still looked provokingly indifferent.

“ Did he ? Did your hear what they quarrelled about ? The young fellow sketched the mill, I fancy. Was his sketch a bad one and the hermit did not like it ? ” he said languidly.

Mrs. Pickering looked indignantly at her husband, who was leaning back digesting his lunch, and wondering how

much longer his wife meant to sit at the head of the table.

“He dined at the mill, did he not Jerome?” she said.

The Vicar roused.

“Yes, my dear, he dined at the mill; but he and Runswick had a dispute about something or other, it appears, and they have avoided one another ever since.”

Glaisdale smiled, he was thinking how skilfully he had managed this unapproachable recluse.

“That is why I say Miss Dawlish is unwise,” said Mrs. Pickering. “She must have known this, and yet she walked on the moor with this young fellow and Clemency Ormiston.”

Perhaps Mr. Glaisdale looked a shade graver, but he did not show any special interest in the subject. His answer was to the Vicar rather than to his wife.

“I dare say Runswick criticised the

young fellow's sketches unfavourably," he said. "No one so touchy as an amateur artist."

The Vicar was prudent. He knew nothing definitely, and it seemed useless to him to repeat his own conjectures, which were after all perhaps wrong.

"Something more serious than that, I should say, for it appears he will not consent to an engagement between the young people," Mrs. Pickering said.

"Of course—and I don't blame him." Glaisdale looked unmoved, though his hostess kept her eyes fixed on his face as she spoke. "They know scarcely anything of one another, and that young fellow had no serious intentions, or he would not have gone away."

Mrs. Pickering drew a deep breath, but as she glanced at her husband she saw his eyebrows arched into his forehead—his usual expression when perplexed;

and then he looked at the door, and she remembered how long they had been at table.

“I want to show you some photographs that my sister has brought me from Nuremberg,” she said. But as Mr. Glaisdale opened the door for her to pass out, she added—“I hear Mr. de Kerjean came back the other day.”

Glaisdale felt angry. He had shown as plainly as he could his distaste for this sort of gossip, and he was strongly inclined not to follow Mrs. Pickering to her drawing-room. But the Vicar was following him, and he had to go on like a sheep.

Mrs. Pickering's rule was to speak her mind when she felt it to be a duty to do so. But somehow the Squire's impassiveness, and the slightly cynical smile that hovered about his handsome mouth, had restrained her communication. Now that she was no longer sitting beside

him, she was impatient to tell him the truth.

She walked up to a table on which the photographs were placed.

“Yes,” she said, while she turned them over, “my husband met Mr. de Kerjean, and he said he was on his way to see Clemency Ormiston—and that he was engaged to her.”

Mr. Glaisdale had placed himself so that she could not face him without turning round abruptly.

“No doubt he speaks as he wishes,” he said with a sneer. “However, Runswick, you say, has quarrelled with him?”

“Yes, no doubt of it,” said Mrs. Pickering. “And I must blame Miss Dawlish for having leant countenance to this acquaintance. I should not be surprised, as the uncle objects, if the girl elopes, as her mother did before her.”

“Did her mother elope with Captain Ormiston?”

“Yes; it was just such another case. Her brother opposed her marriage, and so she went off with the captain.”

“Well, no, my dear,”—the Vicar was smiling—“it was different in two ways. Captain Ormiston was not able to support a wife; and I fancy this young fellow is very well off; and besides,” he added deprecatingly, “I hardly think Clemency Ormiston is a girl likely to elope. Miss Dawlish tells me she has been well brought up, and has a strong affection for her uncle.”

“I am sure she has,” said Glaisdale. He was really glad to be able to say something, for Mrs. Pickering's news had upset him. He scorned the idea of an elopement; Clemency was not at all the sort of girl for such a proceeding; but it galled his pride that she should have

so committed herself, and that the affair should have come to the knowledge of Mrs. Pickering. His pride helped his will. He was more than ever determined to marry Clemency, and he did not think Runswick was a likely man to break his word. It seemed to him that his knowledge of Clemency's disobedience might give him a stronger hold over her uncle. In his anger, he felt that Mr. Runswick was accountable to him for Clemency's proceedings.

Mrs. Pickering had shrugged her shoulders when he spoke of the girl's affection for her uncle.

"I fancy she is the only creature who can tolerate him," she said. "How do you get on with him? You visit, don't you?"

"I don't see much of him. He is so reserved, that I fancy if he is left alone he does not interfere. He's a gentleman spite of all."

It almost amused Glaisdale, in the midst of his discomfiture, to find himself taking Esau's part against Mrs. Pickering, and feeling as if he had a sort of right in him.

He came up to the table and turned over the photographs, but without showing any interest in them. He was now impatient to get away, but he considered Mrs. Pickering a clever woman, and he determined that she should not become aware of the disturbance she had caused in his mind; so he chatted pleasantly about Nuremberg, and other German cities, for nearly half-an-hour, before he asked to have his horse brought round.

CHAPTER XIV.

BESIDE THE RAVINE.

IT has been said that the river, in its way down hill to the sea at Flobay, had found its way into a cleft in the rock which the friction of ages had widened into a sort of ravine. The sides of this rugged cleft, brown and orange and deep red in full sunlight, were hidden here and there by ivy and other clinging plants, and varied by stone walls supporting the quaint, many-shaped houses and cottages that bordered it on one side. Sometimes a bit of garden was walled securely, and hung above the chasm, and balconies, bare now of flowers but filled

with evergreens, were frequent. Far below, the river grumbled over stones, which were often set edgewise in its bed, and caused it to foam angrily with the toil of making its way over them. On the side nearest Baxdale the public road followed the curves of the ravine till it reached the sands of Flobay, but some way before it took its steepest descent, it was crossed by a bridge which seemed the only mode of access to the irregularly set, red-roofed houses on the further side.

From this bridge the view was striking in the afternoon, for then the upper part of these houses, and one of the rugged sides of the cleft, were in brilliant light, and looked a richer orange and red than usual; while an old, quaint, tower-like house, of great height, rose from the very bottom of the ravine in blackest shadow, except where its gabled top came above

the cliff and caught a gleam of sunshine.

There was little traffic on the bridge, and indeed, except at morning and in the evening, this bit of road was unfrequented, unless by tourists who had driven out from Abbeytown, and had been forced by the steepness of the descent to leave their carriage on the top of the cliff.

But tourists had not come to Flobay this afternoon, and as Mr. Glaisdale rode rapidly down the Baxdale road, he saw that the person he was in search of was standing alone on the bridge.

Esau had been taking a walk with his niece along the sands, but she had gone home across the moor, and he stood on the bridge with a vague sense of restfulness in gazing, although he would have been surprised to learn that there was beauty in the scene before him.

He felt cheerful ; he had had a chat with the old sailor, and had given him some money. This old fellow and Clemency were the only two beings who had stirred his feelings since he came to Hollow Mill. But he was not thinking of Clemency now. He had succeeded in convincing himself that if she were left in peace all must go well, and that she would insensibly attach herself to Glaisdale. He had so rooted a belief in Ralph de Kerjean's inherited falseness that he did not fear his re-appearance on the scene.

He roused at the sound of a horse trotting down the loose and stony road ; but he did not turn to look till the horse stopped, then he turned round and saw it was Mr. Glaisdale.

The Squire's enforced calmness during luncheon had left him, and his rapid riding had helped to excite him. When

he saw Esau he felt a sudden wish to lay his [whip across his shoulders. He did not offer to shake hands when the hermit nodded.

“I have been round to the Mill,” he said, “and I heard you would be found this way.”

He did not say that he had met Clemency on the edge of the moor, and that she had directed him; he had no wish to speak of anything but his grievance.

“Yes?” Esau looked at him curiously.

Glaisdale had got off his horse, and he stood at the end of the little bridge.

“I have been told something very strange about Miss Ormiston,” he said, “and I want to know the truth of it.”

He spoke so haughtily that Esau looked sharply at him; and they stood for an instant each staring at the other so sternly that a bystander might have

imagined they would come to blows before they parted.

“What have you been told?” said Esau abruptly.

“That your niece has met young De Kerjean on the moor within the last few days, and that he boasts he is engaged to her.”

Glaisdale’s anger had broken out in his voice, which vibrated harshly.

Esau sneered his contempt, and stayed the storm that had begun to rise.

“When you listen to gossip,” he said, “be sure you get the correct version. My niece did meet this young fellow, but they quarrelled and parted.”

“How can I be sure that this is the correct version?”

Esau’s lips looked more like a line than ever.

“My version was told me by my niece,” he said haughtily; “if you do not

believe her there is nothing more to be said."

Glaisdale struck his whip angrily on the wall that protected the edge of the road from the steep ravine.

"What I complain of," he said, "is, that I have been deceived all through."

The change in his companion's face quieted him. Esau seemed to dilate as he threw back his head with a haughty gesture, and his eyes gave a glimpse of the tempest that was at work in him.

"You are in a false position," he said, "for which you have to thank yourself; I am not aware than any encouragement has been given you; if I offered to help you, it was certainly not to please my niece; now you have ended the matter."

He stood in rigid silence, and then, as Glaisdale did not turn away, he moved from the bridge, passing his companion, but without glancing towards him.

Glaisdale followed him, still leading his horse. Presently he said—

“We have both been hasty, but I think you must see that I have cause for annoyance. You forget that at my age a man is naturally suspicious of the chance a younger man has with a girl.”

“No,” Esau said bitterly; “my experience teaches me that the older man is likely to win in the end.”

“Therefore you think this fancy is really over between De Kerjean and your niece?”

“I have told you all I know. But there is no use in prolonging this discussion; the thing is at an end—as regards you.”

Glaisdale walked on in silence; he felt he had been wanting in tact, he had injured his own cause, and yet if Clemency were really free it seemed folly to give her up for what after all might have been a mere flirtation.

His pride suffered that a girl whom he had chosen as suitable for his wife should have flirted; but then—his opinion of women was not exalted. He did not believe any woman he knew had brought a fresh untried love to her husband, and he had been a weak, romantic fool to cherish such a hope about Clemency.

He knew very well that Mrs. Pickering had spoken to him from a strong sense of duty; and she was not a chattering woman; indeed, near at hand there was no one to whom she could talk of this affair except Miss Dawlish.

He was aware that if Esau left him in his present mood the breach would be irreconcilable. The first thing to be done then was to quiet this passionate old fool, as he mentally called him; the next to get his marriage over as soon as possible so as to stop Baxdale tongues.

Mr. Glaisdale had rarely failed to carry his point, and he meant to carry it now.

“Look here, Runswick, the thing need not be at an end. I have told you before now that I am bent on marrying, and Miss Ormiston is just the person who suits my taste in every way. You must own it was natural that I should feel affronted when I heard this report; I thought this affair was going on, and I felt as if I were being made a fool of. Now that is over, and there is only one thing to be done.”

Esau had been too deeply offended to recover himself quickly. He walked on and took no notice of Glaisdale's pause.

“I cannot keep on waiting. At my age every year is so much taken from my enjoyment of life. Miss Ormiston is not a child. Come now, Runswick,

can you not arrange that we may marry in a month or so?"

Esau's thoughts had gone on to Clemency, and his anger had quieted.

"You must get her consent first."

He spoke stiffly; there was an awkwardness in having to discuss matters with this man whom just now he had longed to push into the ravine.

Glaisdale felt his advantage; he was as easy and self-possessed as possible. "If I have a clear field," he said, "I'll win her consent; hitherto I have felt that something was fighting against me. Now that I know what I am about, if you are willing to give her to me at the end of a month, it will be all right."

His confidence surprised Esau.

"A month is too hurried for the child; it will be better to let her come round by degrees."

Glaisdale controlled himself by a strong effort.

“ Upon my soul I don't understand you, Runswick ; you gave me your word that the girl should marry me, and yet when I ask you to name a time you cry off. Now, if we are to understand one another, we must speak rather more plainly. The truth is ”—he had a very unpleasant smile Esau thought—“ that Miss Ormiston does care for this young fellow, and you, like a kind uncle, want to give her time to forget him. My good friend, one impression will always efface another, and who is to say that she may not find some new admirer while I am waiting. She wants change, excitement, amusement, and I can give her all these. The only real question is, in plain words, Do you wish her to be my wife ? ”

He looked straight into Esau's eyes, and he saw that he had nothing to fear.

“I prefer that she should marry you rather than De Kerjean—if she can be happy with you.”

Glaisdale stroked his silky whiskers.

“Pardon me for saying so; but it is not likely that you can understand women; it is simply a question of practice, and you know you have lived shut up more than half your life. I am sure that if you tell Miss Ormiston that you have promised me that she shall be my wife, she is too right-minded to wish you to break your word.”

Esau did not answer. He was still angry, and it seemed to him that Glaisdale was dictating terms, and yet he saw the wisdom of a speedy marriage for Clemency.

When they reached the point where the road parts, one way going on to Abbeytown, while the other leads to Baxdale, Glaisdale stopped.

“ I am going to town for a week or so,” he said, “ and I should like to have some definite understanding before I go.”

“ It is impossible,” Esau said stiffly ; “ but I will write to you before you come back.”

Glaisdale got on his horse ; he was irritated ; he thought Esau would have yielded unreservedly ; but there was no use in urging him further. Waving his hand he trotted briskly away, his faultless figure looking better than ever from the ease with which he rode.

Esau gazed after him, and he thought that surely a man like that ought not to find it so hard to win Clemency.

BOOK THE FOURTH.

CHAPTER I.

A STRUGGLE.

AS time went by reaction began with Clemency. It was a fortnight since she had met Ralph on the moor, and he had not written to her ; she began to realize that he had been really very angry. Sometimes she thought she would write to him, but unless she promised to leave Hollow Mill she did not think he would care for a letter, and she could not promise to go to Askholme. Her uncle's kindness made her even more depressed ; it seemed as if he realised her sorrow, and thought her justified in yielding to it.

To-night he looked wistfully at her during dinner; but he did not follow her to the study, and she sat there absorbed in the musing which had now become habitual, going over the pros and cons respecting her behaviour to Ralph. Sometimes she wished she had consented to accept Madame de Kerjean's invitation, and then as she recalled her uncle's sad story, she told herself it would have been heartless to desert him for the woman whose want of faith had ruined his life.

Often when her eyes met Esau's, and she saw the never-absent sadness that filled them, so deep an expression of tenderness pervaded her face, that he felt more unwilling than ever to part from her.

She had been thinking much of him this evening, and when at last he came into the study, she rose up to say "Good-

night” with the same tender look in her eyes.

“Good-night, my dear,” he said—then he held her hand a minute, and bending down he kissed her forehead.

Clemency’s heart was so full, that tears came before she reached her room; she felt deeply thankful for this change. In the midst of her sorrow the boon she had so long craved had come into her life—her uncle and she were friends.

She had not spoken again about her intention to leave Hollow Mill—her uncle’s kindness made it difficult, and Mr. Glaisdale had not appeared again. But she had not given up the idea. Now it seemed to her she must wait; she could not leave her uncle. “And yet,” she thought, “the more I cling to him the farther I place myself from Ralph. I can under-

stand uncle's dislike to him now; I can never love Madame de Kerjean, though she is Ralph's mother."

Formerly she used to wish that her uncle would confide in her; now she shrank from such a revelation, and she resolved that he should never learn from her that Ralph knew his secret; it seemed to the loving girl that this would still more wound the proud lonely man. Her uncle's affection was very sweet to Clemency, but it could not make up for the loss of that dear precious love which she had scarcely tasted before she had lost it.

She rose up hastily, and began to pace the room. A strong temptation had come to her, and it took all her strength to resist it. It seemed to her that she had not made Ralph believe in her love; surely if she had he would not have been so cruel as not to write a line to her. He

had asked her to be his wife, why should she hesitate to write and tell him that she was his for ever, and that no other should have her love.

Then as she paced up and down, the passionate longing to write subsided, and she was able to remember all she had said on the moor. If Ralph loved her truly, he must believe in her; she had confessed her love—the warm blood rushed up in confirmation, till it seemed to burn beneath her eyes. Oh yes, he knew how much she loved him; and then she stood for a few agonized minutes, her fingers locked so closely that the white knuckles looked bloodless, while the struggle went on in her heart. If she wrote to Ralph now, she might be his wife;—a look of joy came into her face—he had gone away angry, but he loved her—she knew he loved her—he would come to her, and

There was a break in her happy

reverie. She could never hope to see uncle Esau again if she deserted him in this way after all her promises. And how if she kept faith with her uncle and silence towards Ralph? would he remain angry, and would his love gradually cool into the conviction he had uttered—that her love for him was not real?

Her hands parted and fell listlessly beside her. In a moment she saw her future. She should be deserted as uncle Esau had been, and she should lead a lonely uncared-for life here at the Mill, unheeded by all except Miss Phœbe and her poor neighbours. Something in Clemency's nature had been let loose by that meeting on the moor. "I cannot—I cannot!" her heart cried out. "I should die of it, or else go mad!"

She leaned on her bed, her feet still on

the floor, burying her head in the pillow. It was a long struggle; passion, striving to conquer, flashing sudden light on visions of bliss and on the gloom which shed itself round the path of duty—and then the cloud closed again over all.

At last she raised her head. Her hair had loosened and fell over her shoulders, and as mechanically she went to her dressing-table, where she had lit candles, the sight of her own face in the glass shocked her. She pushed the loose hair off her face and looked eagerly into the glowing eyes before her, and then she drew herself away shuddering.

“I am wicked,” she said. “Is all to depend on human will and human action?—have I no faith, or hope, or love? What would dear little Peter have thought of me if he could have seen my face?”

She sat down and put her hand over her eyes. She remembered on her first visit to the blacksmith's lad, saying how sad he must feel never to be able to go out on the moor to see the wild flowers growing that he loved so dearly, and she could still see the child's grave face as he answered, "It's God's will that I lie here, Miss Ormiston."

Perhaps it was God's will that she should lead this lonely, loveless life. Her heart was so full of rebellion that she shrank from herself, and then a mocking whisper seemed to jeer her as she remembered her little sermons to Obadiah Sleights when he cried out against his misfortune, and longed to be like other lads of his age. What fine things she had said to him about patience and resignation, and the love of God, if we trust Him, making all seem for the best. What nonsense she had talked, and how

good the boy had been to listen at all.

Clemency took her hand from her eyes and looked at herself again. No, that was not her own face she saw there—it seemed to her that she looked like the strange boy himself; so sad, yet hard and bitter, without any of the tenderness of sorrow.

“I am like uncle Esau when I first saw him, and I used to say to myself, that it was because he had no religion. I was wrong. He does not go to church, but he is at heart religious; little things tell me that, and I—I am no better than a heathen.”

She slowly quieted herself, and then at last she knelt down and prayed But when she rose she felt little comforted, only she resolved to lie down and rest without further self-torment. She was bewildered—still in utter darkness; but

her own musing had not tended to quiet or peace. It seemed best to give it all up and to rest.

CHAPTER II.

AT ODDS.

ESAU RUNSWICK'S forehead had puckered into one of its worst frowns as he read and re-read a letter that had come by post from London.

Clemency, who during the last fortnight or so had been striving to distract her own sadness by fixing her thoughts on her uncle, sat watching his face in silence ; she understood him too well now to seek his confidence. The daily kiss he bestowed on her ever since the night when he kissed her in the study, had established a confidence and a sympathy between them that she had never expected to feel ;

and now, though she was sorry for his vexation, she knew he would tell her what caused it if it in any way concerned her. She had grown to feel resigned to her lot, but the bright, vivid interest she used to show about everything was gone out of her life, though sometimes when she met her uncle's eyes fixed on her inquiringly, she sparkled out into her old gaiety again.

Life was really very dull to Clemency. Miss Phœbe had been laid up with a severe cold, and this had ended in deafness—very trying for her visitors; Daniel Lister had never recovered his spirits since his child's death; and Clemency had not been again to see Obadiah. The flowers in Miss Phœbe's garden were dead and so were the bees; certainly there were always treasures to be found on the moor, but walking there of late had been too wet to be pleasant. Clemency

went almost daily down to the sea, where she was sure of dry ground, either on the sands or along the top of the cliff.

Presently her uncle put the letter down beside him, and looked across the table at her.

“I should like a little talk with you before you go out, or we might walk together,” he said.

“Yes, uncle. I will come to you when I am ready,” and she left the room.

She felt a little curious. She knew very well that she had been mentioned in that note, and that something in it had vexed her uncle. It was impossible not to think it was from Ralph de Kerjean, and it was as impossible not to feel excited and engrossed by her coming interview. But Clemency's dulness during these past days had been partly the result of her self-discipline ; she had not conquered her love for Ralph, she told herself that it was

not necessary that she should conquer it, for it could hurt no one—but she tried to withdraw her thoughts from him, and fix them on her uncle and the life that went on around her, and she had been able to quiet her excitement by telling herself that to seek her own happiness was not the way to find it. But the idea that the letter her uncle had read was from Ralph disturbed all her peace.

It was a relief to hear the clock strike eleven—the time at which her uncle usually took his morning walk.

She tapped at the study door and Esau's voice said, "Come in." Clemency started when she saw him. He was leaning back in his chair, his face was pale, and she thought he looked very tired, as if he had had a long journey and was resting.

"You are not well," she said anxiously, "perhaps you don't care to go out."

She spoke tenderly, and Esau looked up at her. His expression puzzled the girl, it was confused, quite unlike his usual direct glance.

“Yes, my dear child, I will go. I want to speak to you, and we can talk as we go along.”

“Let us talk here, uncle,” she said, and she closed the door behind her. Then she felt ashamed of her own impatience, and the colour rose in her face.

Her uncle got up and took his hat.

Clemency saw that a letter lay on the table before him, and she guessed it was the one that had disturbed him. He took it up and put it in his pocket before he followed her out of the room. He walked up the avenue in silence, then took the way which Clemency had followed when she met Ralph beside the beck.

Just before they reached it he said abruptly, "I am troubled, Clemency."

"I thought you were," she said.

"I am going to tell you," he went on, in a strange ill-assured voice, "because you can help me out of my trouble."

"You know, uncle, I would do anything I could to give you comfort," she said, impulsively.

Esau smiled cynically.

"You could certainly help me, it is your good will, I doubt."

At this her heart sank, the note could not be from Ralph.

"Will you tell me who has written to you?" she said.

He gave her a surprised look, her directness always puzzled him. His idea of a woman was that she preferred a crooked way to a straight one.

"I have had a note from Mr. Glaisdale," he said. "Some time ago I promised him

that you should be his wife, but I told him you must have time in which you could learn to appreciate him ; now he reminds me of my promise, and wishes a day fixed for the marriage ; so you see I must consult you, Clemency."

She felt sick and dazed, then she smiled, the idea seemed to her utterly absurd.

" You must please write to him and say that I cannot marry him."

" I regret to be hasty ; but I shall not live for ever, Clemency ; it is better that you should have a home of your own before I go ; you cannot live by yourself, and besides, there is my promise to Mr. Glaisdale, my child. I should not propose him to you unless I saw that he was likely to make you happy. I am sure he loves you very much."

For all the constraint in his voice, she heard the irritation he was holding down,

and she sighed ; how short-lived her friendship with her uncle had been—she made an effort to keep it.

“I am happy with you, uncle, the future is a long way off. Mr. Glaisdale wants a wife who will care for him—and I cannot—oh, uncle!” she clasped both hands round his arm, “why can’t we go on as we are, are you so very tired of me?”

He would not trust himself to look at her. Sitting in his study he had gone through the scene beforehand ; he had known exactly what she would say, but he had not counted on her sweetness, and he hardened himself against it.

“Be reasonable,” he said, “there are many reasons why this marriage should not be delayed. I saw Glaisdale before he went away to London, and he asked to marry you in a month. I told him this would be too hurried ; but I think you

ought to decide that in two months from now this marriage may take place.”

Clemency looked at him in dismay.

“Are you serious? No, you cannot be serious, uncle. I have told you why it is impossible that I can marry Mr. Glaisdale; don't urge me, please don't.”

The piteous tone touched his heart.

They were now beside the noisy beck, so full from the recent rains that it rushed along like a little brown torrent, carrying twigs and even branches over the stones in its bed.

Mr. Runswick leaned against one of the trees beside it, and Clemency thought he looked very stern.

“We will never discuss that subject again. You set yourself in opposition to my wishes, because you choose to take a fancy to a person who recalls to me the saddest part of my life,” he said angrily. “My idea was that you were too

proud to hanker after a man who had given you up, even if your feelings for me count for nothing. You must make up your mind now to marry Glaisdale," he said decidedly.

"Uncle, you cannot want to make me miserable. I had begun to think you really cared for me," she said passionately.

He gave her such a tender look that her heart stirred with a strange surprise. He did not answer for a few moments, then he said :

"God knows how I love you, child ; if you have any love for me you will marry Glaisdale."

He spoke so impressively that she was dumb. It was plain this was no caprice, his heart was set on her obedience. Clemency could not speak, her feelings seemed to stifle her with their strength. At last, tired of her silence, he said abruptly :

“ Well, what is your answer ?”

“ I have no other than the one I have given, but will you give me a reason why you press this on me ?”

“ A reason !” His patience was worn out. He felt that gentleness was wasted on her. “ I have given you more than one sufficient reason already, but I should have thought that it was enough for you to know that I have pledged my word to Glaisdale.”

She shook her head, she longed to say, “ you ought not to have done this,” but she could not answer him in her old defiant manner, she could not bring herself to quarrel with her uncle, and she felt that one ill-judged word must produce a quarrel now.

“ I do not want you to answer,” he went on, “ or to say any more, the less discussion we have the better, but you must marry Glaisdale in two months’ time.”

Then he walked away abruptly, leaving her standing just where she had stood with Ralph de Kerjean.

Clemency shivered with terror. She thought her uncle must be mad, but her determination did not waver; she would never marry Glaisdale. She stood still, dazed with anguish at this bitter sorrow. There was only one recourse open to her, she must leave Hollow Mill; and now it seemed hard to leave it. She loved her uncle far more dearly than she loved Mrs. Butler. It seemed as if, one by one, she was being called on to give up all those she loved.

“It is better to be as I was when I first came here,” she said, “a child who loved cats and dogs and ducks almost as much as human beings. In future I will only care a little for every one alike.”

Then she went wearily home, walking upstairs so slowly and heavily, that Anne,

going into the kitchen, told Lettice " Eh ! but Miss Clemency mun be ill, for she hev gone upstairs as solemn as a judge ; nobbut she can be as nimble as a cat on a hot back-stone," she added.

CHAPTER III.

MISS PHŒBE'S COUNSEL.

CLEMENCY could not sleep, she tossed feverishly on her bed, and when she got up next morning she felt unrested and ill. She had not seen her uncle again; at dinner time he sent word he was busy in his study, and when she came down this morning she found that he had already breakfasted.

The poor girl did not know what to do; it was so terrible to break with her uncle, and yet she could not obey him; she must go to Mrs. Butler if she could receive her, and this was doubtful, for the last news

she had heard of her friend was that she and Mary felt tempted to go out to Dorothy and make their home in Australia. Clemency began to count up the people she had known while she lived in London, but they were few, and she could not think of any one to whom she could apply for a home. For a moment she thought of claiming the Vicar's protection, and then she remembered that he was Mr. Glaisdale's friend, and would of course take part with him. She had lived enough in society to be aware that love on both sides is not always considered necessary in marriage, and she could not confess her love for Ralph to such a stranger as Mr. Pickering. How could she confess it at all when it was possible that Ralph had given her up.

In the afternoon she determined to call on Miss Phœbe; when she reached the garden gate she saw the spinster standing

in the porch and saying Good-bye to Mr. Glaisdale.

He saw her, so she could not retreat, and he looked very happy at the sight of her. He greeted her gently, and somehow Clemency could not bring herself to dislike him. When he asked her if he might call next day at the Mill, she did not know how to refuse him.

As soon as he was gone, Miss Phœbe kissed Clemency again.

“I congratulate you, my dear child,” she said; then seeing the girl’s grave face, “Mr. Glaisdale has been telling me of his engagement to you.”

“Come in-doors and sit down, Aunt Phœbe,” the girl said, sadly, “if you only knew how weary I am of all this.”

Miss Phœbe led the way into her own little parlour where a brisk fire was burning, and she pushed the only easy chair in the room forward for Clemency.

“No, you sit there, dear,” the girl said, and she put her hand on the spinster’s shoulder to put her in the chair, and then knelt down beside her. “Oh, Aunt Phœbe, how difficult life is, and how happy children are, if they only knew it.”

Miss Phœbe was still a little deaf, but Clemency’s lips were so near her ear that she heard her plainly. Her face grew pinker, the girl had not confided to her her love for Ralph, and she had never asked the result of the meeting with him, though she felt inquisitive.

“Are you then not happy, dear?” she said.

Clemency hid her face on Miss Phœbe’s bosom.—

“You must know I am not happy; do you think I should have gone to meet Ralph de Kerjean if I had not—not loved him; and yet hardly more than a month after, you congratulate me about Mr. Glais-

dale,—do you really think me so shallow-hearted, Aunt Phœbe ?”

“You know I think you very sweet and loving and true, dear;” the perplexed spinster took refuge in fondly kissing the bit of flushed cheek close to her own, “but I understood from Mr. Glaisdale that the marriage was settled, and that your uncle approved of it; what does it all mean, my dear ?”

Clemency got up from her knees, and Miss Phœbe saw that she was crying.

“I see there is no use in coming to you for comfort,” she said, “you will always side with uncle Esau; but I did not come to perplex you, dear, with my troubles.” Her eyes were full of tears, and yet she laughed in her old, bright way, for Miss Phœbe’s face had creased and puckered into a truly comic aspect.

“I’ll tell you what I really came for,” Clemency went on—“I want to know

about Aunt Butler,—is she going out to Dorothy or not?”

Miss Phœbe nodded.

“I thought she would have written to you,” she said, “I heard from her a few days ago; it has all been settled in a hurry; Mary’s chest is so delicate that her mother is advised to go as soon as possible, and there are friends going with them—I forget the exact day they leave, but it is very soon—she says there is not even time to come down and bid me good-bye”—she looked sad and tearful, but only for a minute.

“My dear, it is absurd and selfish of me to think I shall miss her. I have never seen her more than once in every five or six years, and I can just as well think of her in Australia; she and Mary will be so happy with Dorothy; only you see we cannot think of one another at the same time now because her nights will be my days.”

“Yes,” said Clemency absently.

She wished Miss Phœbe would not be so good and resigned about everything. How could anyone so placid enter into her anguish of mind? It was selfish to trouble the sweet, serene woman, with her grief.

“But never mind me: I want to understand about you, my dear.” Miss Phœbe looked up lovingly at her young friend. “You went to meet Mr. Ralph; but then I heard he had gone away at once—sooner than was expected—for he had bespoke his room at the inn for two or three nights. So when I heard of Mr. Glaisdale’s proposal, I thought no more about the other.”

Clemency turned away and began playing with the vases on the mantel-shelf.

Miss Phœbe watched her anxiously; she remembered Mrs. Pickering’s advice as to the motherly duty she owed Clemency. It was self-evident that Mr.

Ralph had gone away angry, for the people at the inn had told her maid Sophy so. Moreover, he had promised to come and see her; and he had never even written to her: perhaps he did not mean to come to Baxdale again. And then she remembered Esau Runswick's request. She knew that he would have said she was wrong to give that message to Clemency; but Miss Phœbe thought that young people should be dealt with fairly, and if Mr. Ralph was determined to see Clemency he would have gone to Hollow Mill, even had she refused to undertake his commission, and if he had gone, there would have been a quarrel with Mr. Runswick.

Surely, as Mr. Ralph had given up Clemency, and her uncle wished her to marry the Squire, it would be much wiser and more dutiful in her to make up her mind to obey his wish.

All this passed through Miss Phœbe's brain while she sat admiring the grace of the figure now bending over her mantelshelf; and then more worldly thoughts crept in. How beautiful her darling would look dressed in furs and velvets—with diamonds, too, for Mr. Glaisdale would be sure to give her diamonds; and how cheering it was to think of having her dear young friend settled so near her. But Miss Phœbe turned at once from the last idea as selfish, and came back to the subject of Clemency's happiness.

“My dear,” she said, tremulously, it seemed to her so cruel to add blame to the dear child's load of sorrow, “I hope you won't mind my saying you are wrong.”

“Am I?” Clemency spoke without turning round.

“Well, dear, I'm afraid you are. You know, Clemency, girls often do what

you're doing now: they go on caring for a man who gives them up, and takes a fancy to some one else; and then they harden themselves against some one else whose life they could have made happy; and so they stay single, and a single woman has not nearly as much power of doing good as a married one has, my dear."

"I don't agree with you. I'm sure you do more good than Mrs. Pickering does. Those two sick women, Hannah Slater and Mary Rider, are always praising you and your doings; and all they can say of the Vicar's wife is that she's 'bonny, and that she wears braw silk gowns o' Sundays.'"

Miss Phœbe shook her head.

"That is because her lame foot keeps her from getting out among them; but folks about here say 'a good Jack makes a good Gill,' and that our Vicar's wife

couldn't help being good : and she is good, my dear, I am sure of it. At the same time, think of the influence you would have on Mr. Glaisdale, Clemency, dear ; and what you might do for the poor people at Thorpe. I always think if a wife can do nothing else, she can take her husband to Heaven ; and you can do much more than this, my dear child."

Her own unusual eloquence, and the effort against her shyness, had brought tears to dim Miss Phœbe's tender blue eyes, and she wiped them away.

Clemency knelt down again beside her, and put her arms round her neck.

"I do love you so, you dear thing," she said, "that I wish I could please you ; but now look here, just for the sake of argument, suppose I did marry Mr. Glaisdale—I have never been rich, or accustomed to luxury, and to as much

amusement as I could wish for—how do you know that I should try and wean him from the world? I might perhaps find the world so very pleasant, so full of amiable people, all kind, and trying to please me, so full of brightness and variety, just the things I most care for, that I should be content to be happy in it, and give up all dread of its temptations; I should, perhaps, simply get to love it, Aunt Phœbe, and then, what would become of me?"

She laughed and stroked the pink, perplexed face; then tenderly kissing Miss Phœbe, she rose up.

"I must say good-bye now, dear; you cannot help me, and don't you worry about me. You have done well single, and so shall I, I promise you. I will try not to waste my life; if I do any good with it it will be because I have learned from you how a woman can spend her life

for others. Please don't urge me about this marriage, I cannot see it is right to do evil that good may come."

Miss Phœbe had also risen, and she held Clemency's hand clasped between both hers.

"No, my dear, no; I could not mean that; I meant that loving your uncle as I know you do, Clemency, this compliance with his wish would please him so very much; he—he came to see me, and—and he spoke about it." Clemency turned pale. "Yes, dear, and it is so sad to see a girl go on pining for a man who has, you know—at least, you don't know—who has——"

"Don't, Aunt Phœbe, please don't," the girl said, imploringly.

"I won't, my dear; I won't say anything against him—I am very fond of him, you know, and I don't like to think anything bad of him; but Clemency, dear,

this state of things will make you miserable; will take the heart out of all your work," she said, earnestly; "indeed it will; and, my dear,"—she felt that the girl's hand was struggling to free itself—"there is something else——"

"What's that?—tell me,"—Clemency felt too heart-wrung to be patient.

"Why, if you come to hear of his marriage, you will hate his wife—you will indeed; you could not help it, and then think how dreadful that would be—it would be worse than anything, Clemency, to feel you couldn't help hating a fellow-creature."

Clemency was too overwrought to betray her feelings.

"You think I should make a good hater, do you, Aunt Phœbe?—well, perhaps I should, and it would be a new sensation. I believe I once hated uncle Esau for a little while"—Miss Phœbe

shuddered — “yes, and I have quite detested Lettice; but those were mere hate-explosions, there was, what clever people call, no ‘sustaining power’ in them. I’m not at all sure it wouldn’t be amusing to have such a new sensation as a good dogged hatred; I’ll think about it, dear. Good-bye,” and she went, leaving Miss Phœbe so upset, that she shed tears as soon as she was alone.

Clemency was walking desperately along the road. “There’s no help for me on earth at any rate,” she said, bitterly.

This insistence, that Ralph had forgotten her, had almost begun to tell on her faith in him. She felt crushed with sadness.

She was half way down the Avenue when she suddenly stopped. “Why do I believe Uncle Esau and Miss Phœbe, instead of giving him the chance of justifying himself? I know why; because I

shrink from recalling my existence to his mind, when he is perhaps trying to forget me." . . . She paused. What was there in her to remember? Ralph de Kerjean must see plenty of girls far more attractive in every way. "Well, say he has forgotten me; it will only be a humbling for me, and I believe I am very proud, so it will do me good. . . . But I will not be tempted to think he has forgotten me."

She hurried on, looking so much brighter than she had done all day, that her uncle, whom she met at the bridge, felt relieved, and greeted her affectionately. She went indoors resolved to write to Ralph de Kerjean, and tell him her uncle's determination to marry her to Mr. Glaisdale.

CHAPTER IV.

AT CHATEAU DE FOIGNIES.

THEY are resting to-day at the Château de Foignies. Two days ago the place was astir. Towns-people from Caux came up to see the flags and the decorations, and also, as they stood in a crowd round the gates, to catch a glimpse of "Mademoiselle Julie," as some of the old inhabitants still called her, and of her "young gentleman." These good people had gone back to Caux with plenty to tell the stay-at-homes—how they had seen Madame de Kerjean, and how beautiful and young she looked, so young indeed that it was past belief that the stately

young gentleman with her could be her son—much more fit to be her husband, they said; in fact, Madame Dupont, wife of the chief hair-dresser at Caux, pronounced the semi-professional opinion, that he had already some grey hairs, and that he looked grave enough to have white ones.

“Bah! he is older in expression than the dear old count himself, who, in spite of his lameness, stood under the portico, and was seen to fold first Madame de Kerjean and then Monsieur her son in his arms; and then he had blown his nose violently and taken snuff.”

“Ah, the poor dear man,” Madame Nogent explained next morning when Monsieur Dupont was as usual dressing her hair for the day, “that is because of his too tender heart; he takes snuff to conceal his emotion; I do it myself,” the old lady said.

But to-day everything was quiet at the château. The outer and inner courts, and the exquisite opal tint on the stone wall that parted them, and the half-cared-for look about them never seen in England, might have furnished a background to a painter of the story of the "Sleeping Beauty." The grass in the plots on each side was long, with that sort of greenness that suggests damp, and perhaps water at its roots, and the blue slaty paths had also a green tinge, for the sun, usually so generous to the unshaded, dry front entrance, had also gone to take a nap behind the clouds.

Old Matthieu still lived in the lodge on one side of the gates, but he seldom left his chair by the fireside now; he was very old, but he had been excited by the arrival of his young lady and her son, and as they drove in, Mademoiselle Julie had

kissed her hand to him as he stood uncovered beside the gate.

The countess had been dead some years ; Julie had paid her father several visits since her marriage, but this was the first time she had gone to the château with Ralph.

The Count was delighted with his grandson, and now as they sat chatting with him in his library, as he called it, the old gentleman complimented Julie on her son.

“ *Mon Dieu,*” he said, “ he makes me young again to look at him—he takes me back years ; but he is English, my child, very English, while you—you are as French as ever, my friend ; you have not lost your gaiety, eh ? ”

“ I ”—Julie cast down her eyes—“ and yet it is time I became sedate ; I am an old woman almost.”

The Count snapped his fingers.

“Listen to her,” he said, “and tell me if she is not amusing; she has not a wrinkle or a grey hair. Tell me, Ralph, do not Englishmen admire your mother?”

“Of course they do, my grandfather; there is no one like her, you know.”

“No one? Oh Ralph, my friend, is that true?” his mother said.

The pathetic tone in her voice roused the Count; he did not see quite so plainly out of his bright little eyes, but his ears were almost as sharp as ever.

“Aha,” he rubbed his hands with delight at the prospect of being able to tease his grandson, of whom it must be confessed he felt a little awed, “is there then some charming Mees who is for you more admirable than even my Julie,” he stroked her fair hair proudly.

Ralph felt annoyed; he got up and walked to the window.

Julie held up her finger at her father, with a smile full of mischief.

“When we are alone,” she murmured, “not now, it would vex him.”

“Come here, Ralph, my friend;” the merry, white-haired old gentleman was too inquisitive to be abashed by his grandson’s displeasure, and indeed, when Ralph turned round and met the pleasant, twinkling blue eyes that seemed to make the delicate face glow like a bright, though withered apple, his vexation vanished. The old man held out his hand, and the young one raised it reverently to his lips.

“That is charming,” said Madame de Kerjean, clapping her hands. “I knew you two would be friends.”

“We have always been friends, though Ralph has grown into a man since he last came to see me. It is strange—he a little reminds me of Monsieur Esau, Julie; do

you remember, my child, that handsome young Englishman ?”

Madame de Kerjean blushed, and looked prettier than ever, and at this her father leaned back in his chair and laughed, till he had to take a pinch of snuff to quiet himself.

Then he turned away from his daughter to Ralph.

“ Aha,” he said, “ if I were to tell tales ; she is reasonable now by comparison, but she had her little romance once upon a time, my boy ;” then sinking his voice to a whisper, he said, “ he was a fine fellow that young Englishman, and he was crazy with love for your mother ; her marriage made him furious, and he went away ; he was a great loss to me, and I have never forgotten him.”

He half closed one eye, and shook his head mysteriously ; he wanted Ralph to ask questions, but Julie did not approve

of these revelations, and her son was silent.

“I want to take Ralph into the gardens, my father, he sketches most charmingly, and I think he could make a picture of the château; come, Ralph, I will show you the way; oh, it is delightful to be here together, my friend.”

Her father looked mischievous.

“Presently, presently, Julie; you forget how long I have been living here alone, hoping for this visit. Now you have come you are not going to run away, and you will have plenty of time to show Ralph the garden, the terrace, and all your old haunts. Apropos of the terrace,” said the old gentleman, slyly, “have you ever met with my young Englishman, my friend?—he was too charming to lose sight of altogether. I should like to see him again.” Ralph walked away.

Julie was vexed and she pouted. “I

don't think he can be charming now; I wrote to him, and he has never answered my letter."

"You wrote to him and he has not answered? He must indeed be changed; why," the Count turned to his grandson, who was now looking earnestly at his mother, "he was so desperately fond of her that I feared he might commit suicide when he heard of her marriage."

"*Méchant*," said Julie. "You are romancing, and I positively will run away and leave you to take your nap. Come with me, Ralph, we must not tire the dear grandfather."

She held down her forehead for her father to kiss, and then went away with Ralph, kissing the tips of her fingers at the door just as she did five-and-twenty years ago.

"She is altogether charming," the old gentleman said with a sigh of satisfaction;

“but I must know the story of this English Mees she hints at, is it possible that Ralph too has had his little romance. *Ah, ma foi*, is it not amusing? and it is possible, yes, it is possible, for he is English, and I have always heard the English are a romantic people—they marry for love! I remember Monsieur Esau told me it was a sin to marry without love. *Mon Dieu*, how nations differ,” and he laughed, till the tears came into his old blue eyes at the excellence of the joke.

Ralph could hardly wait till he and his mother reached the garden, empty of flowers now, the berceaux and woods only showing bare branches.

“Mother,” he said, coming close up to Madame de Kerjean, “what did you mean? Did you really write to Mr. Runswick?”

Julie had been mortified by Esau’s silence, and she was now vexed at having

spoken of her letter; it seemed childish, when she had all this time kept the secret from Ralph; but something in the atmosphere of the château always made her feel childlike, it seemed to her that she was a girl again when her dear old father teased her; and now looking round at the well-remembered scene, where every tree recalled some childish association, she felt surprisingly impulsive.

“Yes, my Ralph,” she gave him a tender smile, “I thought I would make you happy if I could, so I conquered my scruples and I wrote to Monsieur Esau, asking him to give you his niece.”

“And he has taken no notice?”

She shook her head, and he saw the pain in her face.

They walked on in silence till they reached the steps leading down to the first terrace. Two years ago, when Madame de Kerjean paid her last visit to

her old home, she ran down these steps gaily, and scarcely wasted a thought on Esau Runswick, but then it must be said that Monsieur de la Roche Jagu was her companion—and he was so new an admirer that she had not tired of his handsome face, or of listening to the commonplace sentiment which he addressed to her.

There was no hardness in Julie's nature, and she gave a little sigh to the memory of the Vicomte as she went down the steps. But by the time she reached the stone seat on which the old gardener, Antoine, had carefully placed cushions this morning, a deeper, stronger memory had awakened. Her confession to her son, and then her effort in writing to Esau, had made Julie more thoughtful, and as she gazed down at the river below, where a little fishing boat with a dark brown sail was passing slowly on its way to Caux, she

felt a strange, new compunction, as her parting with Esau came back.

“How he loved me,” she thought; she remembered with glowing cheeks that she had not been able to meet his ardent glances; then those kisses—first kisses—she sighed; Esau must have loved her very dearly, he had never married, he had given up the world for her sake.

Ralph spoke to her, but she did not hear him, she was feeling humbled, and this was a new sensation for Julie; it was humbling to see how much better the man had loved than she had, she had been unhappy for a few weeks, but how very soon she had allowed herself to be consoled. “But it was my duty,” she said.

She looked down at the river, Ralph had grown impatient of her silence, and had walked to the other end of the terrace to see the view.

In her son’s absence the protest of duty

sounded feeble; the memory of the first affection took fuller and fuller possession, till Julie could almost see her young lover standing before her, and hear his deep voice imploring her to be true to him. She told herself in [this absorption that, happy as she had been in her married life, she might have been yet happier with Esau. She had flung away a jewel of price, one of those loves which one reads of in books, an all-absorbing passion which would have, which indeed had, sacrificed everything even to the memory of her love. How could she be surprised that he did not forgive her? He must for ever despise the weak, sandy nature in which he had tried to cast anchor.

She covered her face with her hands, and a deep shame spread over her soul: just then she would have done whatever Ralph asked her; she so longed to be forgiven by her old lover.

But the moment passed ; and Ralph, wrapped in his own troubles, stood resolving what to do at the corner of the terrace, unconscious of the chance he had missed. He was thoroughly angry with himself.

He must leave the château ; he wanted to be alone, he wanted active movement and change of scene to get rid, if he could, of the disturbing influence which made him feel at times that he must return to Hollow Mill.

When he went back to the inn at Flobay, he was told that Mr. Glaisdale was going to marry Miss Ormiston, and although he could not believe this report, he came to the conclusion that her uncle probably wished for the marriage, and that Clemency would end by yielding. Still he would not give up hope. He waited anxiously for three weeks at Askholme, but no letter came from Clemency ; then,

when his grandfather wrote urging him and his mother to come and finish the winter with him, he made no opposition to his mother's request that he would accompany her.

Now, as he stood on the terrace, he told himself that Clemency was lost to him. Mr. Runswick would never give her to him. He must try to get her out of his thoughts.

“In this wintry weather,” he thought, “I could get some wolf hunting in Brittany, and our steward will be glad to see me at Kerjean. I shall go.” In his heart he believed that Clemency would be true to him. But he did not acknowledge this belief.

When he turned round to go back to his mother, he saw old Antoine coming carefully down the steps. Monsieur le Comte, he said, was above in his garden chair, and he wanted Madame to be so

kind as to come and walk beside him while he went round the grounds.

Ralph followed her, and at the top they found the cheery old gentleman impatient for their appearance.

“That is well,” he said, rubbing his hands. “Now I will have two companions instead of one—one on each side; is it not so, my children?”

He was so content to prattle on in his harmless, bright way, that he required little more than a smile or an occasional word from his companions. Madame de Kerjean soon found walking beside the chair, drawn at a slow rate by an ancient pony, so cold a process, that she asked Ralph to run races with her, and came back laughing with a fine colour in her cheeks.

“*Mon Dieu,*” said the Count, “and this is the girl who says she is growing old—she looks just twenty.”

“Naughty Papa!” says Julie; but the kindly flattery pleases her, and brings back her spirits.

“After all,” she thinks, “I am a shallow creature, and I must be what I am. Thinking makes me unhappy, and Esau would have expected me to think. Now the dear Marquis did all the thinking for me. He said he did not wish me to gain a grey hair or a wrinkle from any care which he could shield me from; his only idea was to put pleasure into my life. Ah! he was not young, but he was adorable. If I had married Esau I should perhaps have grown old and sad, and then his love might have changed—who can tell? *Mon Dieu!*” she said, with unconscious wisdom, “it is not me he now loves and thinks about, it is the child of seventeen—Julie de Foignies.”

CHAPTER V.

DARKNESS.

CLEMENCY had written her letter ; she meant to tell her uncle of her appeal to Ralph, and then she hesitated. She did not doubt her lover, but he was proud, and she had refused to do what he asked ; and after all she could not blame his silence so much : his request had been reasonable. She now simply asked him to deliver her from this marriage with Mr. Glaisdale, and she resolved to await his answer before she told Esau what she had done.

The day after she had sent her letter Mr. Glaisdale came to the Mill. He was

very pleasant, so kind in entering into all her pursuits, so much more like a father than a lover, that Clemency could not dislike him. The consciousness that she could make no return for the thought and care he bestowed on her affected her with a conviction that she was ungrateful to this man who had singled her out to give her his affection and his name, and in whom she was obliged to confess she could find nothing absolutely to dislike.

It seemed to her that Mr. Glaisdale had changed altogether since the evening he dined at Hollow Mill, and so he had. He really loved Clemency as truly as a man of his nature can love, and the wonderful instinct of love had taught him a certain amount of sympathy with her feelings. He knew now exactly what would pain and what would please Clemency, and though sometimes when she

smiled at him he found it difficult to keep his feelings under control, he did succeed in restraining their warmth; and as Esau thought it more prudent to be present during the visit, it passed off easily, and without any pain to Clemency.

It was a very silent evening after this, for though Mr. Runswick followed his niece into the study, he began to read at once, and remained till bed-time apparently absorbed in his book.

Clemency kissed him, and said Good night; but still she lingered. She felt such a reliance on Ralph's help that she could not be angry with her uncle; she was sorry for him, she was sure that her conduct would give him so much pain when he knew what she had done.

“Uncle,” she said, “will Mr. Glaisdale be coming here often?”

“Yes, I think so;” he was almost surprised by her coolness.

“ Well, then, you will always be present when he comes, will you not, please ? ”

He looked at her and smiled.

“ This is foolish, Clemency ; you do not give the poor man a chance of pleasing you. Your dislike is incomprehensible. ”

“ On the contrary, I liked him to-day ; but if I had been alone with him I know I should have hated him. ” Then she felt desperate. “ If you won't promise what I have asked ”—she looked resolutely at him—“ I shall say, ‘ I am not at home, ’ when he calls. ”

Esau frowned as he always did at decided opposition, but it seemed to him that even this condition was a yielding on Clemency's side ; and she had treated Glaisdale very civilly this afternoon.

“ You are a silly girl to have these fancies, ” he said, “ but I suppose you must be humoured. ”

Since this evening Glaisdale had paid several visits, and as he kept his feelings out of sight, Clemency maintained her good opinion of him, though she shrank from hearing Miss Phœbe praise the Squire.

He had brought the Vicar with him one day, and Mrs. Pickering had sent a message of apology, and a hope that Miss Ormiston would excuse her on account of her lameness, that she would dispense with a formal beginning, and come and make her acquaintance. Clemency bowed, but she was determined not to go and see Mrs. Pickering.

When the two gentlemen went away Esau praised the Vicar.

“If I had known he was so simple and sensible, he might have come sooner,” he said.

Clemency went away to her room; this visit filled her with misgiving; she felt as if she were in a net, out of which

the only escape would be to marry Mr. Glaisdale; for it was evident that the Vicar and his wife considered her engaged to him. She could not understand Ralph's silence, unless he had gone away, and even then she thought a letter sent after him would have reached him.

After this she grew depressed and silent. She would not go even to see Miss Phœbe, but spent most of her time in-doors. Although her uncle had obeyed her wish, and was always present during Mr. Glaisdale's visits, much to that gentleman's chagrin, Clemency had a secret dread of meeting the Squire alone on the moor, and there she could not have escaped him, or the expression of his love, of which, in spite of all his efforts, she sometimes caught a glimpse.

She was right in thinking that he would try to meet her alone. He was extremely impatient of Mr. Runswick's

intervention, and yet knowing the man's uncertain temper, he was obliged to submit. Mr. Glaisdale usually left Hollow Mill inwardly furious at having been unable to get a moment alone with Clemency; and then, by the time he had galloped across the moor, he laughed at himself for his folly. In a few weeks she would be his wife, and then what would all these petty vexations matter. Her calmness had reassured him. At first the news about De Kerjean had made him very angry, and he felt sure that Runswick had led him into a trap in order to mortify him; but the meeting beside the ravine had quieted his doubts; and during his visit to London he had met with the friend who knew De Kerjean, and had asked him to find out for him something about the young man's movements. To-day he had heard from this friend that De Kerjean had left Askholme, and was supposed to be travelling

on the Continent. This news made Glaisdale happy. A man determined to win a woman would not go abroad and give another man a chance of winning her.

His love had made the Squire strangely modest; except for gifts of the most exquisite flowers his hot-houses could furnish, he had not yet ventured to make a special present to Clemency, though he had purchased several costly offerings during his last visit to London. To-day he took out a case containing an exquisite ring, an antique set in brilliants, and resolved to take it with him to Hollow Mill. He stood looking at it, thinking how well it would look on her pretty hand. In three weeks more the term agreed on by Esau would have elapsed, and yet he had not been able even yet fully to realise that Clemency would marry him.

“I expect too much from her, she

is naturally shy," he said; "my foolish fondness for her longs for a warmer return; but she could not behave better than she does, she is always kind and sweet, and after all, I dislike demonstrativeness in a woman."

He thought as he rode slowly over to Hollow Mill that it was possible Clemency might have cared for Ralph; well, there was no harm in that, he was sure she had too much spirit to go on thinking of a man who had given her up. "I will soon make her fond of me; I never failed with a woman yet, and she will be the fonder from a kind of resentment against the young fellow's desertion; he must have been a faint-hearted cur to give her up."

He thought he must give Esau a hint to leave them alone to-day, although it was certainly very awkward to turn a man out of his own room, but he must

have the pleasure of giving the ring to Clemency when they were alone.

As he cantered down the avenue, he met Mr. Runswick, and he saw Clemency a little way behind.

It was too fortuitous a chance to be lost.

He bent down and spoke in a low voice to Esau : " Let me have a few words with Miss Ormiston alone, will you ? " He rode on, and springing from his horse, was standing beside Clemency almost before she had seen him coming.

They exchanged greetings, and then he walked beside her up the avenue. Runswick had gone on, but Mr. Glaisdale saw that Clemency was trying to overtake her uncle. He began to suspect that she wished to avoid him. In a moment he replaced the little packet in his pocket. He resolved to show her he

would take no advantage from this *tête-à-tête*.

“I brought your uncle a bit of old ivory the last time I was in Paris,” he said, watching her face, “I wished to bring you a gift but I saw nothing good enough.”

“You are very kind.”

“Kind to try to please you! I fancy the kindness has its origin in self-pleasing.”

She looked at him, and she could not mistake the love in his eyes.

“I wish you would not think about me,” she cried, “it is a pity to waste your thoughts on me.”

“I cannot help it,” he said simply. “I only ask you to think kindly of me in return; I would not grieve or tease you on any account.”

Clemency wished her uncle would go on instead of standing still, looking at

them with that expectant gaze; she had felt quite able to tell Glaisdale that he would grieve her if he persisted in his visits to Hollow Mill. They had reached Esau by this time, and his dark eyes seemed to make her dumb.

Mr. Glaisdale walked with them as far as the moor, and then drawing Esau apart, he put the little packet into his hand, and asked him to present it to Miss Ormiston from him.

Clemency was so silent after the Squire's departure that her uncle hoped it was a good sign, and it seemed best to let the impression deepen.

But the girl's silence continued; she was nerving herself for a last appeal to her uncle. Glaisdale's manner and his words had made her realise her position in a way she had not yet done, and she saw how desperate it was, unless she

brought herself to rebel openly. And if she did, what would become of her? She had no money, and she had partly anticipated the quarterly allowance her uncle gave her in providing Christmas gifts for a treat which she and Miss Phœbe had arranged to give to several families in the village.

She had no means of leaving Hollow Mill, and she knew that Miss Phœbe would not help her to oppose her uncle. Her sense of isolation was complete and terrible. She blamed herself for having accepted this dependence on her uncle; she knew before she came to him that she should be cut off from the power of forming friends, or acquaintances even—she had simply yielded to the spell which her uncle's letters, and the glimpses she had had of him during her school life, had exercised on her imagination; and instead of a home, she had chosen

for herself a prison, with an inexorable jailor.

She felt capable—if she had had the means—of escaping alone to Askholme, and imploring Madame de Kerjean's protection. But this thought shocked her out of her despair and braced her nerves. She pictured Madame de Kerjean a proud, stately lady, who would probably look on her as an adventuress bent on marrying her son; Ralph's mother could have no heart, Clemency argued, or she could not have forsaken her uncle Esau.

Dinner was just over when she made this reflection, and as she looked up she found that her uncle was intently studying her face. She felt that he too had some purpose in his mind, but she was in too dejected a mood for argument. If she spoke now there must be open war between them.

“My head aches,” she said; it did ache

heavily, and looking at her pale cheeks, Esau believed her, "would you think me very lazy, uncle, if I go to bed instead of spending the evening with you?"

There was such an imploring entreaty in her eyes, that he let her say Good-night without giving her Glaisdale's ring.

He too began to feel that something more must be said. The time for the marriage had been fixed, and they were fast drifting towards it, but Clemency made no attempt at preparation, she evidently had not consented to fulfil her part of the engagement. Glaisdale had told Esau that he intended to go abroad directly he was married, and to have the Manor House beautified and re-furnished during his absence—he had even asked to be allowed to provide the trousseau, but Esau had peremptorily refused. He had himself written to a

dressmaker whom Mrs. Butler had recommended for Clemency, and had told her to send the usual requisites for Miss Ormiston's marriage outfit, naming the sum he intended it to cost, but he had not spoken of this to Clemency. He was like the ostrich hiding its head in the sand—he told himself that when she found all was ready, and that there was no means of escape, Clemency's common sense would help him out of the difficult position in which he had placed himself.

The wave of perplexity spread that night from the Mill to the Manor, neither Glaisdale, nor Esau, nor Clemency slept—the darkness without, was light compared with the darkness within. Each of them felt on the verge of a catastrophe.

CHAPTER VI.

IN A WEEK.

JULIE DE KERJEAN had found it impossible to keep up her dignity under the merry, mocking eye of the father who had petted her from childhood ; and Clemency, in full morning light, found that the doughty determination, with which in her sleepless night she had resolved to attack her uncle, crumbled and wavered under his stern aspect at breakfast-time. It was long since she had seen this old look on the dark face, which had lately been so genial ; and when he said he

wanted her in the study, she felt timid and unwilling to go.

He followed her through the dark passages and drew the curtain across the door, then with a rather formal politeness, he asked her to sit down.

“I was asked to present this to you,” he said, and he placed Glaisdale’s packet before her.

Clemency opened it mechanically, then when she saw the ring she closed the case and pushed it from her.

“It is from Mr. Glaisdale, uncle?” He bent his head. “Then I cannot take it; I cannot take anything from him.”

“Clemency, this is absurd, you have let the matter go on too far, you cannot draw back now.”

“Uncle!”—he started just a little—her voice was so decided, and there was a flash in her eyes he had not seen there for many a day, “I have never

changed, I never meant to marry Mr. Glaisdale.”

“ You must marry him.”

She got up and came closer to him.

“ Do you want to make me hate you, uncle Esau—no, what am I saying, I could not hate you if I tried, and you know that, and it is cruel, tyrannical, to use your power over me as you do; why can't you leave me in peace, and tell Mr. Glaisdale I don't wish to marry.”

She spoke imperiously, she had meant to be calm and dignified, but his stern manner frightened away her self-control.

“ I have answered all that long ago,” he said wearily. “ You do not consult either your own self-respect or mine by this dispute.”

He looked at her sternly; she had lost

all her newly-gained power over him, she was the defiant girl again that he had not been able to trust.

“Self-respect!” she cried out passionately, “do people think of self-respect when they are drowning, or when the house is burning? and I tell you, uncle, I had better drown than marry a man I have no love for.”

“Nonsense, child,” he said sharply, “you will love him when he is your husband.”

He stopped, the girl's eyes had so wild an expression he was alarmed, he began to feel he must try and quiet her. “I must confess that you disappoint me, Clemency,” he went on, coldly, “you profess affection for me, and yet when I try to do the best thing I can for you, you will follow nothing but your own will. You choose to bestow your love on a person I dislike, and with whom it is impossible I

could be connected, and even when that person gives you up, and leaves you, you still persist in setting yourself against my wishes.”

“No,” she had grown quiet while he spoke; “I am willing to stay here for the rest of my days.”

He gave her another keen glance.

“I prefer to see you married, and besides, you seem to forget that I have given my word to Mr. Glaisdale. I cannot provide for you as he can, and he can give you a far happier life than you can have with me. I have been too patient with you, you owe me some duty and obedience, you must tell me in so many words when you will marry Mr. Glaisdale.”

She did not look at him.

Pale as a ghost, with head bent and clasped hands, she stood before him, while she quivered from head to foot.

“I cannot marry him.”

He looked at her curiously. “Clemency,” he said, “you drive me to extremes, you make me say what I never meant to tell you. Once my name has been disgraced, and that was done when your mother fled away from my roof with a mere acquaintance, of whom she knew only that he had a handsome face and a pleasant voice; now you want to disgrace me a second time; I gave my word to Glaisdale that you would marry him; you know this, and you want me to perjure myself, and tell the man I have changed my mind.”

Clemency had kept her eyes fixed on her uncle while he spoke, and a new idea had come into her head—all at once it seemed to her she saw a way of escape.

“No,” she said, so quietly that he stared at the change in her voice, “I do

not ask you to say that now, will you give me a week to think it over by myself?"

"Very well."

He spoke ungraciously and turned from her. He wished himself miles away, everything was going wrong with him. He was full of uneasy misgivings. Hitherto he had not been happy or content with his life, but he had been able to put the blame of its failure on others; his life had been spoiled for him. Now he was conscious of being in a false position, he was no longer passively discontented, but he was striving to do what Clemency said would make her unhappy. Her words made him angry, but her pale face and heavy half-closed eyes troubled his soul.

Even when she quitted the study he seemed to see her standing before him, pale and sad.

She went quietly up-stairs, more serious than dejected in appearance. The idea that had come to her seemed an inspiration, and she longed to be safe in her own room to think it out.

It had come to her that she would appeal to Mr. Glaisdale himself. Surely, she thought, he would not wish to marry her if he learned that she had no love left to give him—that she loved another man. But at this Clemency's cheeks flamed so hotly that her idea seemed impracticable. She could not say to Mr. Glaisdale that she loved Ralph, when Ralph had given her up. "I need not say I love him," she said. "Mr. Glaisdale will not ask who it is, but he will set me and uncle Esau free. I wonder I never thought of this before."

The sight of the ring had made her position all in a moment more imminent to Clemency and her uncle's manner

had shown her how vain it was even to hope for pity from him. He would only consider her wrong in every way.

Now came an eagerness—almost a terror—lest her uncle should guess at and intercept her purpose. She must go at once to Thorpe Manor House this morning, for something warned her that Glaisdale would call in the afternoon, and that Mr. Runswick would not trust her alone with him, after her passionate outburst. Her success with the Squire depended on seeing him alone; if uncle Esau were by her, he would either irritate her into saying what she did not mean to say, or he would make her appear in a different light; besides—and a fresh rush of red dyed her face—she did not feel that she could make her confession, supposing that she had to make it to Mr. Glaisdale, before her uncle. Secretly she hoped that it would not come to this, but that the Squire

would at once release her when she told him that she shrank from marrying him.

The air was bright and clear, with just sufficient vapour over the woods to make the slender branches show out in red tracery against it,—underfoot was the crisp brittle heather, which snapped and crackled as cheerily as a wood fire; while, from a pond between the old vicarage and the parsonage, came merry shouts and cries, telling that sundry red-cheeked, blue-nosed village urchins had given the school-master the slip this morning, and were sliding away right merrily on the ice.

All this seemed to give Clemency courage. She struck across the moor on the left so as to avoid all chance of a meeting with Obadiah. Now that she was in sight of the gates of Thorpe Park, the glow of impulse left her, and she began

to feel nervous. Arrived at the gate leading into the long avenue, her heart beat so quickly, and she felt so limp and powerless, that she longed to turn back. She stood still and looked round her. The very sight of the broad lands stretching out on either side, and the gables of the old Manor House showing through the trees, framed in by the pointed arch of the far-reaching avenue, recalled her purpose, and the fate that threatened her, if she failed to execute it. She held a brief commune with herself; and then she went on timidly, but feeling that after all it must be right to tell Mr. Glaisdale the truth.

The house looked charming to-day; its quaint many-sided stone oriels shone opal grey in the warm sun, and over the nearest of them was trained a leafless jessamine, covered with exquisite yellow blossoms, which peeped in at the upper

windows ; while a pyrocanthus spread a dazzling array of scarlet berries below. The narrow strip of border round the house showed patches of violets here and there, and great tufts of Christmas roses ; it was a truly English exterior, full of beauty and suggestive of comfort within those mullioned windows.

A fresh temptation to retreat seized on Clemency. Could she not have written ? What would the servant who opened the door think of her coming alone to see Mr. Glaisdale ? She had just decided that a letter would give her no certainty of release, for Mr. Glaisdale might not read it, or he might choose to ignore it, when she saw through the glass doors at the top of three long stone steps that her arrival was known already ; a servant was coming across the hall, and now he was holding open the door for her to pass in.

“I want to see Mr. Glaisdale in his study on business,” she said.

Clemency had made up this little speech as she came ; she thought this would secure her from seeing any visitors ; but now she felt hot and cold all at once. She heard a buzzing in her ears, the hall seemed in a mist, so did a passage along which she followed, she was only conscious that her feet sunk in soft deep carpet, and then she roused to see a door flung open, and to hear said, in pompous slow tones, “Miss Ormiston, wishes to see you on business, Sir.”

Glaisdale was sitting in an arm-chair in front of the fire, smoking. He jumped up in a scramble, for his feet were very near the fire, and he was lounging far back in his very comfortable easy-chair.

His first impulse at the sight of her timid, blushing face was a feeling of

delight; but by the time he had shaken hands with her, and had placed her in the most comfortable seat he could find, he felt alarmed and jarred. It set his teeth on edge that the girl he meant to be his wife should do a thing like this, and expose herself to the comments of the servants' hall, and probably to those also of the village of Baxdale. He glanced nervously at the window, an oriel on the opposite side to that which Clemency had admired, and he was glad to see that the blinds were down all but one, and although he commanded a view of this, he felt sure that no one passing by could distinguish Clemency in her easy chair near the fire.

“This is very kind of you”—he smiled—“but the stupid fellow should not have shown you into this den; I'm afraid it smells of smoke.”

“Oh, no, I don’t mind. I—I—asked to come in here because I want to speak to you without chance of interruption.”

What did it all mean? Glaisdale tried to hide his wonder.

“I am delighted,” he said; “I hope you are going to make me useful.” He thought in all his experience of woman this was the quaintest adventure that had befallen him. “I hope my little gift pleased you;” and then he crossed the hearth-rug, and came so close to her that she nearly cried out with fear, for it seemed to her not unlikely that he might offer to kiss her.

The sudden alarm brought back her courage; she sat up stiffly and looked at him.

“It is beautiful,” she said, “but I cannot accept it; I have given it to uncle Esau to return to you. I ought not to have accepted your flowers, but that did

not quite rest with me. You are under a mistake about me, and I have come to set you right."

"My dear child," he put his hand on her shoulder in a fatherly manner, "you need give me no reason for coming to see me; it is too kind and delightful altogether;" and then he took one of her hands in his.

Colour rose in Clemency's face, she drew her hand away, and rising she moved a little apart.

"I have not come to give you pleasure," she said; "I am sorry to pain you, but it cannot be helped. My uncle has begun to think I—I am going to marry you; but I cannot—indeed I cannot."

The sweet entreaty in her eyes, and the lovely glow on her cheeks, were driving Glaisdale frantic.

"Please sit down," and he pushed the chair to where she stood, but Clemency

only put her hand on its back to steady herself; "I know all you mean to say, my dear girl; and I could have spared you the trouble of coming here—if it were not so sweet to see you." He said this with a warmth that startled her, but he went on. "I know that you understand my love for you," he said this tenderly, "and you do not feel able to return my feelings at present—I have seen all this, and it will be the aim of my life to win from you some of that love which I know you are capable of feeling."

He looked imploring, and Clemency began to wish she had not come to Thorpe Manor House.

"But I can never love you, Mr. Glaisdale."

"I do not ask for love at present; I only ask you to give me the sweet friendship you have lately shown me, and let

me prove my love to you by making you as happy as I can. I love you, Clemency, more than you know"—he said this passionately, his eyes fixed so devouringly on hers that they drooped—"Surely you will take pity on me; if you cannot love me, you will give me hope."

He snatched at her hands, and she let him hold them. She saw that only the greatest calmness could restore his self-command.

"You are mistaking me altogether," she said, and drawing her hands away she seated herself quietly. "You must know that only a very serious motive could have brought me here to-day. My uncle tells me that I am to marry you because he has given you his word that I shall do so. I cannot—I would not harm any man as I should harm you if I married you without——"

He interrupted her.

“If I choose to take the risk,” he said, “that is my affair. You—you mean that you have fancied some one else, and you are afraid——”

Clemency grew red, and then as suddenly white. “You are quite wrong,” she said, indignantly; “you do not know what you are talking about. It is no fancy; I love with all my heart and soul—surely you do not want to marry a girl who has no love left. I don’t hate you now, but if I were your wife”—she stopped; there was almost hate in her eyes, but while he shrank from it, a sound stopped his reply; he turned to the window. There stood Mr. Pickering, not looking into the room, but evidently waiting to attract the Squire’s attention. Glaisdale went to the window, and the Vicar rapped sharply against the pane.

“Come out, Glaisdale,” he said; “I’ve driven round a pair of chesnuts to the

stables; I want you to look at them; make haste."

Glaisdale was cool in a moment. He flung open the window and leaned out, effectually screening the Vicar's view into the room.

"I'll follow you directly," he said; "I have just a business matter to settle first."

He watched the Vicar off, and then he came back to Clemency.

"You are agitated and excited," he said; "you will be quite alone if you stay here; let me find you in half-an-hour or less, and then we can talk more quietly."

Clemency hesitated. His manner was determined, and she felt afraid of him.

She did not answer; then the delight in Glaisdale's face showed her that he believed in her consent, and she shrank

away in such evident fear that he retreated. "But Mr. Glaisdale, I will not deceive you," as he turned to leave her. "Nothing can ever make me love you or marry you."

Glaisdale hesitated. A strange look of love and anger shot across his face; but he forced himself away and Clemency was left alone.

CHAPTER VII.

SUSPENSE.

AND meantime the wave of disturbance that had reached from the mill to the Manor House, rolled across the Channel and communicated its restless influence to Julie de Kerjean and to her father. Ralph had left them the day after he had decided to do so, and at first he had written regularly to his mother from Château Kerjean ; then came a pause ; and then he wrote saying he had formed one or two hunting engagements, both near Quimperlé and at Landivisiau, but as the last was an out-of-the-way place, he thought it would be wiser to direct

letters to him, "Poste Restante, Quimperlé."

By this time Madame de Kerjean had received quite a heap of communications addressed to her son, forwarded from Askholme, and on receipt of his letter she began to make them up into a packet for Quimperlé.

She was sitting beside her father in his den, and he was looking at her; he liked to watch her dainty fingers sorting and packing the letters.

"There are three from ladies," she said, thoughtfully; "two are from his father's cousins in London—you would like those old demoiselles De Kerjean, father—but this one puzzles me." She took up Clemency's letter as she spoke.

"Why do you not open it?" said the old man, sily; "it is better than worrying over it," he added, and he laughed at her alarmed face.

Julie shook her head, and she placed the unknown letter at the bottom of the packet. "You do not know Ralph, my father. I would not dare to open one of his letters."

"You might dare anything, my angel," said the old man; "you do not know your power," and he laughed again at her grave face; then, after a pause, he shut one eye and looked slyly at his daughter.

"She is afraid," he said, "and she does not know what she is afraid of. Shall I tell you, my friend? I have not forgotten the little story you have told me about the English Mees, and you fear that Ralph might return to her, though you thought she had sent him away. You are afraid that the letter is from the charming Mees, recalling your Ralph to her side, and saying that she is ready to become your daughter. Ah, *Mon Dieu*," he began to laugh, and leaned back in his

chair to be more comfortable. Julie took out the letter and looked at it.

“Yes, I am sure it comes from her,” she said, in a vexed voice. “Why can she not leave the poor boy in peace? I am sure she sent him away, and it will only grieve him.” She turned to her father, and then she bent down and kissed both his withered cheeks. “There is no one who can sympathise like a parent,” she sighed. “Parents love their children, and children love themselves, till they too have children, and then it begins again; but, my father, I did not tell you that this English girl is the niece of Monsieur Esau.”

The count sat upright again, his eyes and mouth wide open with eagerness to listen.

“A niece! Aha! a daughter perhaps. Are you sure about the niece, Julie?”

Julie gave her head a little toss.

“Yes, yes; quite sure. She is daughter

of Mr. Runswick's sister; her father was Captain Ormiston; but, my father, she has no mother."

"Ta-ta-ta"—the old man snapped his fingers—"it is delightful; it is amusing beyond words to tell; it is indeed a romance. Ralph shall marry the niece, and you, my Julie, shall marry the uncle, and I shall once more talk to my dear young Englishman, so it will all end happily, like one of Madame d'Aulnoy's fairy tales."

"No, no, my friend," said Julie, blushing, and shaking her finger at her father; "you go too fast. At present Monsieur Esau will not even hear the name of De Kerjean spoken; he almost turned Ralph out of his house when he learned he was my son."

The count rubbed his hands and laughed. "He had not seen you, then," he said.

“No; and I do not suppose we shall meet.” She gave a little sigh. “I am afraid of such an ogre; and besides——”

“Bah!” he said; “leave matters alone; all will come right. Ralph has plenty of money, so have you, and so have I. Money is not so important as happiness to these young people.”

Julie looked at him saucily and pinched his cheek.

“*Ah méchant.* Then why did you not let me marry Monsieur Esau?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “That was another affair. He was not rich, and he had a sister to provide for; and more than all, your mother told me he was not suited to you.”

“It was my mother then?” she asked.

He nodded. “Is it not always the mother in these affairs,” he said; “do you really think if you had come to

me, my Julie, and said, 'my good papa, I cannot be happy—without Monsieur Esau,' that I could have refused my little girl. No, no, it would not have been possible; but it was best as it was, eh, my angel?"

Julie kissed him.

"Yes," she sighed; "poor Monsieur Esau! it was best as it was; I could not have had a better husband than De Kerjean."

"And Ralph is like his father, and he will choose well; do not doubt the girl is a good girl; like you. Send the letter on and leave him to decide, my child, if she is pretty and good that is all you want." He took a pinch of snuff, as if the matter were settled, while his daughter sent off the packet of letters to her son, addressed, "Poste Restante, Quimperlé."

There came no answering letter of

acknowledgment, but in about ten days a note, scribbled in pencil, from Château Coatfrec, near Landivisiau.

Ralph told his mother he had been unlucky enough to slip among the rocks while boar-hunting, and had sprained his knee—he had been unwilling to alarm her—but he was now recovering; and, as he was advised to use his knee instead of resting it any longer, he hoped before the end of the week to reach Château de Foignies. There was no mention of Quimperlé in the letter; it was plain he had not been there.

Madame de Kerjean wrung her hands, and was inconsolable. At first she declared she would go and nurse Ralph, but the Count pointed out to her that she was not asked, and suggested that she might find herself *de trop* in what was evidently a mere hunting box, not at all suited to the requirements of a lady.

She had to content herself in getting ready an invalid couch in every room which she thought Ralph would like to use, while her father looked on amused; and when all was done, he suggested that probably Ralph would prefer to walk about, or at any rate to sit upright.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD LOVERS.

GLAISDALE managed to get rid of the Vicar and of the pair of chestnuts in far less than the half hour he had asked Clemency to wait for him, and then he hurried back to his study.

It was empty. Happily Mr. Pickering was out of hearing, for the outcome of Mr. Glaisdale's anger and disappointment was not edifying to listen to. He swore that Clemency should be his wife, if it were only to punish her for her daring; and then he told himself that if she really meant to give him up, she would not have come to tell him so. In the first

burst of disappointment he was ready to hurry after her; but, as he cooled, he saw that it was wiser to wait; then, as he stood where she had been standing a picture of pensive loveliness, he swore he would not lose her, he would go to Esau Runswick and insist that he should keep his promise and that there should be no delay in the marriage — her uncle should keep his word.

Next day he felt that he could wait no longer, and he rode off in the afternoon to Hollow Mill.

Timothy, profiting by his master's absence, was sleeping in his pantry, and Lettice opened the door to the Squire.

“T'master's out, Sir,” she said, “an Miss Ormiston hev been ill sin' yesterday.”

“Ill! What is the matter?” he asked, anxiously.

“Eh! she's ill,” said Lettice, doggedly,

“she’s kept her bed sin’ mornin.’ Ah dunnot know what ails her.”

“Are you sure she can’t see me?”

Lettice stared in surprise.

“Nay,” she said, “she’s too ill to see onny foaks.”

Glaisdale felt savagely angry; he had no excuse to linger. Writing a message to Clemency, he left word that he should call on Mr. Runswick next morning, then he trotted up the avenue. He longed to meet some one on whom he could wreak the vexation that possessed him, but there were only trees in the avenue and along the road. Presently he met four or five pigs, and he dashed into the midst of them, cutting at them with his whip, till their piteous yells drew some children into the road to see what was happening.

He rode on recklessly, and when he had come to the end of Baxdale he took, at haphazard, the road to Abbeytown.

Before the Squire had ridden a mile further, he saw a carriage driving rapidly towards him. This was a rare sight in winter time.

As he rode by, he saw that it was a fly from Abbeytown, the fair face of a lady leaned forward to look at him, and he fancied that there was some one else in the carriage. A woman was sitting beside the driver.

For a moment Glaisdale wondered at the unwonted sight, but he soon went off to the thought of Clemency, and rode on to Abbeytown; while the carriage made rapid progress towards Baxdale.

It stopped at the top of the avenue, and the driver got down and came to the window.

“Ah cannut go down t’ hill,” he said, “t’ horse cannut kep his feet whiles t’ ground is froze.”

Ralph de Kerjean got out and looked round him. He could hardly believe he was at the dear old place again.

“Yes you can, if you’re careful,” he said, “the maid can wait here, and I will walk while you lead the horse to the mill.”

The man grumbled, but Ralph’s decided tone prevailed.

Ralph walked down the hill beside the carriage, he was still a little lame, but he looked very happy.

“Mother,” he said presently, “you will do so much better without me, I will leave you as soon as I have asked if Mr. Runswick is at home.”

“No, no, Ralph, no.” Madame de Kerjean was half crying with agitation. “I cannot meet him alone, what will he think if I seek him in this way?”

Her son smiled for answer.

The carriage stopped, and Ralph opened

the door and kissed the pretty, pettish face.

“Darling mother, Mr. Runswick will think you the most devoted mother in the world, and he will make me happy for your sake—I had better keep out of the way; the sight of me will rouse painful recollection at first, and perhaps do mischief; come,” and he held his arm for her to lean on.

“You are always so masterful,” Julie said, with a sigh; and then she thought of Esau and got out of the carriage.

Timothy had roused by this time from his nap, and opened the door.

“Is Mr. Runswick in?” Ralph asked. When the man answered “no,” Julie felt relieved.

Ralph was sure that if Mr. Runswick had any inkling of what was in store for him, he would keep out of the way. He decided therefore to wait for Esau,

and he proposed to his mother to return to the carriage.

But Julie had begun to look round her; she thought Hollow Mill strangely picturesque, and she said so. Ralph's mind was so full of Clemency that he felt impatient of his mother's raptures, besides he wanted to go on to Baxdale to arrange with Miss Phœbe to take his mother in; but Julie had walked on to look at the ruined mill.

Lettice's report of Clemency, and the girl's refusal to see him, had greatly troubled Esau Runswick. He had gone off hurriedly to find the Flobay doctor. He was sent from one cottage to another, then he learned that the doctor was away, and might not return till evening. Lettice had looked so grave when he started that Esau determined to go to Abbeytown unless Clemency's state had improved in his absence.

He came down the avenue, full of this new perplexity; it was more than perplexity—a feeling of remorse made him almost writhe as he walked on with bent head, seeing nothing before him. He felt as if Clemency had sunk under his tyranny.

All at once he saw the carriage standing near the bridge, and then, looking on, he saw a lady standing at the angle of the house gazing at the broken wheel. Some one else came in sight now, speaking to the driver, and in an instant he recognised Ralph de Kerjean. Esau stopped short, he became very pale, and his knees trembled, for he realised what lay before him. His first impulse had been to turn back, but Ralph gave him no choice. He came quickly forward, took off his hat, and bowed profoundly.

“My mother has come to see you,” he said, “will you permit me to introduce her to you?”

He spoke as if the pair of old lovers had been strangers, while Esau followed him mechanically across the bridge.

“She is so anxious to see you,” Ralph went on, “that she came with me to-day.”

Esau did not try to speak; he had followed Ralph like a child; he was too confused to grasp anything but the fact that he was going to meet Julie.

She turned round as she heard their footsteps; the glisten of her furred wraps, and the frosty air, set off the beauty of her fair, peachlike skin, and make her look beautiful. The bright, timid glance she lifted to Esau's face was bewitching.

Ralph drew a little aside, anxiously watching the meeting of the former lovers; he thought his mother looked charming as she bowed gravely as to a stranger. Then, as she looked at Esau,

with a sudden impulse that sent a radiant colour to her sweet face, she came forward quickly and held out both her hands.

Mr. Runswick looked shy and ashamed. He had made no offer to shake hands until Julie put out hers ; but then he took them both in his, bowed over them, and let them go.

“You have a delightful house here, Monsieur Esau,” Julie said, in her pretty broken English. “Will you permit me to walk down to the end.” She looked towards the river.

Esau started at the sound of her voice, but he turned at once and walked beside her.

“You will let me rest a little, will you not?” she said gently, “while my Ralph makes some arrangements for me. He has spoken to me much about this delightful spot.”

“I shall be very happy,” Esau said, stiffly.

He felt in a dream. † The voice and the smile carried him back to the past, and yet this charming woman, so self-possessed and full of repose, seemed to be a stranger.

“Ralph, my friend,” she said sweetly, “Monsieur Runswick is good enough to say I may stay with him till you come back.” Then, when Ralph, secretly amused at her manner, had turned away and left them alone, Julie looked up at Esau like a sweet, confiding child.

“I wish to know what you think of my boy,” she said.

It seemed to Esau, as they stood looking at the caves beside the river, that time had bridged over the space of five-and-twenty years since they parted. Surely it was in that same sweet, confiding tone that the real Julie—the

Julie of his love-dreams—used to speak when they sat together on the old moss-grown bench on the terrace at the Château de Foignies. He looked at the Julie beside him as he had not dared to look till now. As those sad searching eyes rested fully on hers, Madame de Kerjean's colour deepened, and she looked away.

“She is still beautiful,” Esau said to himself, “and she is very young spite of all; but,” he sighed, “she is not Julie de Foignies.”

Julie heard the sigh, and her courage rose.

“You have not answered my question,” she said brightly.

Esau bowed with a sudden self-possession that piqued her.

“You must pardon me, madame,” he smiled; “I was thinking of you instead of your question. Your son is a fine

young fellow I am sure. Will you not come in and rest by the fire? You must be cold after your drive."

The spirit of chivalry lying dormant in Esau's nature—the spirit which Clemency had evoked for a time on her return to Hollow Mill—roused and braced him up for the interview. There was a daintiness, a charm about Madame de Kerjean that exacted deference.

When they reached the house he told the wondering Timothy to bring tea at once to the study, and then he offered his arm to Julie with a grave politeness that charmed her.

"Our passages are dark and uneven," he said; and as he took her to his study, his heart throbbed strangely near the hand beneath his arm.

He wished her to sit on the sofa beside the fire, but Julie took possession of Clemency's favourite low chair.

“It suits me best”—she gave him a sweet glance; “it tells me, too, Monsieur Esau, that a lady occupies this room sometimes, for gentlemen do not care for such seats.”

His eyes drooped beneath her inquiring glance.

“My niece lives with me.”

She noticed his dry, unwilling tone, but Julie was resolved to conquer him, and, although unwilling to plead Ralph’s cause, the excitement caused by the sight of her old lover and this show of resistance spurred her on.

She nodded her head playfully.

“I am a witch in love matters, and I am impatient to see the charming niece who has so turned the head of my boy.”

“I am sorry that I cannot present her to you”—he felt for a moment glad of Clemency’s illness; “she is not able to

leave her room. I have just been to seek a doctor for her."

Julie looked sympathetic. Then she smiled and shook her head at Esau.

"It is but a slight indisposition, I hope. Let us take Ralph to see her; he will prove a good doctor, I am sure."

Esau had seated himself beside her; now he rose up and leaned on the mantelshelf.

"It is impossible, Madam, for him to see my niece"—he spoke very coldly now—"she is promised to some one else; I cannot allow her to see your son. She will soon be married."

Julie clasped her hands and looked at him in sad surprise.

"It cannot be possible, Monsieur, that Miss Ormiston wishes to marry some one else than my Ralph."

Esau felt suddenly angry. By what

right did she ask him this? But he stood silent, still leaning on the mantel-shelf.

In a moment he felt her soft touch on his arm.

“Dear old friend,” the sweet voice was saying, “have I then come all this way to beg a favour of you only to be refused? Ah, Esau, I had not thought to find you so cruel and unforgiving.”

His name on her lips unnerved him, he looked round, for he heard a sob in her voice. Julie’s face was buried in her handkerchief; she was crying in earnest. Even he could not disbelieve in the sobs that shook her as she sank back into her chair and abandoned herself to her grief.

He had been quite unprepared for this appeal, and he felt caught in a trap. He walked up and down the room to give her time to recover herself; he longed to leave

her, and yet the subtle fascination of her presence held him there.

Julie was deeply wounded. She thought he might at least show sorrow for having grieved her; and then it occurred to her that he did perhaps feel sorrow, yet was unable to reveal it.

“Men are so *gauche*,” she said to herself; “and this poor Esau had such strong feelings.” But she was humbled; she thought it would have been easier to recapture her old lover, and her next words were timidly spoken.

“I beg your pardon for giving way, but—but old memories have been too strong for me. You wish me then to understand that I have taken this journey in vain?”

Still he did not answer. She drew her furs more closely round her, and rose from her low seat.

“At least you will say you forgive me before I go,” she said; and although the

words were shyly spoken, a tenderness thrilled through them, and reached his inmost feelings.

He turned and looked at her; she smiled, she thought she had conquered. The smile froze his outburst, ready to utter itself.

While he had listened to her pleading he could only remember that Julie—his Julie once—was pleading for forgiveness in a voice that said her sorrow equalled his; but as he looked at her, beautiful, richly dressed, with a happy smile on her lips, and, as he saw in that clear-sighted moment of suspicion, a forehead free from every trace of care, his worst feelings rose.

“How can you ask that?” he said, harshly. “You who could not feel, if you tried, the sorrow you ask me to forgive. Why should I forgive? You could not have been happy all these

years if you had ever wasted a thought on the wreck you made when you deserted me. You never cared to be forgiven; you——” He broke off, smiling half in scorn for himself, half in passionate admiration of the sweet beseeching face so tenderly raised to his, for in that moment he had rekindled a flash of her girlish love, and Julie felt as if she must die if he did not forgive her.

She took his hand and kissed it.

“My Esau,” she said, “you are not greater than God, and He forgives the worst sinners.”

She felt his hand tremble.

“Forgive me, Esau,” she whispered, and she held up her lips to his.

He could no more resist her now than he could have resisted her five-and-twenty years ago.

He drew her to him and kissed her

fervently; then as he let her go, a quick remembrance clouded his face.

“Julie, God knows I wish I could do as you ask,” he said, “but it is not possible; my word is pledged—I cannot break a promise.”

Julie was sadly troubled, her own feelings had made her forget Ralph and his love; but she would not give up.

“Dear friend,” she said, with a blush that made her look like a girl Esau thought, “think well what you are doing. Are you not sinning against these young people as my parents sinned against us? Before, I could understand your opposition, but now, you have no reason against my Ralph.”

Esau was deeply moved, his brain seemed to reel under this pressure; he stood thinking, or trying to think calmly. It was a relief to hear the

door opening. Timothy came in with the tea.

“Will you give me a few days?” he said; “I will do what I can; but the young people must not meet till I have seen you again.” The interruption had brought back his calmness, and she felt that the spell was ended. She was not satisfied, but she dared not urge him further now.

“Shall I explain to Ralph when he comes back?”—then her quick wits made her add, “I will go to him now, dear friend, if you will take me to my carriage: it is best that you and he should not meet till all is arranged.”

Esau offered her his arm, and led her in silence till they reached the bridge, then as he placed her in the carriage she leaned forward and whispered,

“Esau, do not be long in making up

your mind ; I have so much to say to you, dearest of friends.”

With a long silent look he pressed her hand, and they parted. Madame de Ker-jean sank back and wiped her eyes. Esau stood where she left him, looking after the carriage till it was out of sight.

CHAPTER IX.

REST.

MEANTIME Lettice had been unable to keep to herself the wonderful event of the day, and she went upstairs with some broth as an excuse. She had found Clemency this morning in a very feverish state, and the girl had fainted while she tried to drink a cup of tea; since then she had, Lettice thought, been sleeping soundly.

Clemency was sitting up in bed with a flushed face.

“Lettice, what is happening? Some one has come this morning, and then I heard

a carriage drive up. Something unusual is going on. What is it?"

"Eh Miss Ormiston Mr. Glaisdale hev come."

Clemency sat more upright, her eyes glistened, and she certainly looked ever so much better, Lettice thought.

"Never mind Mr. Glaisdale. Who came in a carriage?"

"Well, Miss, there was a lady an' a gentleman; and t' lady is here yet." She went and looked out of the window. "Nay, Miss Clemency, she's going away; t' master's putting her into t' carriage—she's going away. My sakes, Miss!" she said in alarm, for Clemency had sprung out of bed, and barefooted, with her hair hanging down, was peeping over her shoulder at the parting between Julie and her uncle.

"Eh, ye mun get into bed, Miss Ormiston," said Lettice, reprovngly;

“you may hev got a chill for aught Ah knows.”

Clemency gave a long soft sigh.

“Don’t be afraid, Lettice; I shall be all right now. Put a fresh log on the fire, and send Anne up with some hot water, and when I ring, tell uncle Esau I shall be glad to see him. I don’t think I can venture down; my head is so shaky. That lady was Madame de Kerjean, was she not?”

Lettice looked stubborn and bewildered. Some weeks ago she had thought Mr. Ralph was courting Miss Ormiston, then plainly the master had taken offence at him, and Mr. Glaisdale had come, and Miss Ormiston, everyone said, was going to marry the Squire; but to-day when Mr. Ralph appeared, bringing his mother—such a beautiful, rich-looking lady too—along with him, the complexion of things seemed altered.

“ Ah knows nowt about it,” she said. “ T’ gentleman ’at comed was t’ draughter ’at dined wiv you an’ t’ master.”

Clemency wished she could have seen the lady’s face, but uncle Esau’s head had come in the way. It was plain, however, that the old lovers were reconciled, and the girl felt very happy. She got up and dressed, and then she sat waiting for her uncle; but it had grown dark enough for candles before uncle Esau made his appearance.

When he came in the girl thought he looked singularly pale.

“ You are better, I hear,” he said, cheerfully. “ You gave us all a fright this morning, Clemency.”

“ Did I? I am much better, thank you.” Then she said, timidly, “ You have had visitors to-day.”

“ Yes ”—he sat down looking into the fire—“ I have seen a very old friend; I will tell you about it later.”

He sat thinking before the fire. Clemency sat still gazing at him. He looked worried and worn, she thought, and yet there was a new and wistful lovingness in his dark eyes bent on the hearth. Almost it seemed to her that patience had at last come to uncle Esau. She wondered if Madame de Kerjean had made him happy. "She must love him; she cannot help it," the girl thought, as she looked proudly at the dark pathetic face.

Just then he turned to her with a strangely sweet smile.

"I am very tired to-night, Clemency, child,"— he sat thinking again, but at last he roused and came and stood facing her.

"You have done me more good than you know," he said, gently; "you have made it possible for me to believe in a woman."

His tone touched her deeply.

“How good you are to me.”

She took his hand and kept it between hers, fixing her eyes on him with a tenderness that filled him with compunction.

“Don’t say that,” he said, gravely; “we are both tired to-night, and we need rest; we are best apart. Come to me in my study to-morrow, and we will see what can be done.”

He kissed her forehead in his usual way, but Clemency was stirred by his manner; she put both arms round him and kissed him warmly. “Good night, dear, dear uncle Esau,” she said, as he returned her kiss; “you don’t know how happy I feel.”

Esau went slowly downstairs. Somehow his heart dwelt more on Clemency than on Julie, for he felt humbled by the girl’s forgiveness, and his many

unkindnesses pressed on him. He went in to his solitary dinner, but he could not eat, and much sooner than usual he went to his study. But he was restless to-night; he soon left his armchair, and began to walk up and down the room, thinking.

His interview with Julie had stirred him strangely—had shaken him out of the crust which these years of monotonous life had spread over his self-knowledge, and he saw himself as he had been at Château de Foignies. How full of feeling for others, how indignant at the Count's interference with his natural affection he had been in those far-off days. And yet now he could not bring himself to feel as bitterly as he had felt all these years towards the Count de Foignies.

His thoughts went back to Julie, travelled slowly over her many charms,

loitering here and there with a pleased satisfaction that imagination had not gone beyond the truth ; all the charm, and more than the charm that had enthralled him still lived in his fair-faced love, all but the fresh youth which had been perhaps less attractive than her perfect manner now, and yet—Esau walked up and down with quicker steps. He knew—though he could not have shaped his knowledge in words, that while he longed once more to bask in the sunshine of her presence—the Julie he had seen to-day could never altogether satisfy him, she was not the ideal he had created.

He went and leaned against the mantelshelf. . . . Had he, — thought went on after a while,—been wrong all through? If he and Julie had married, might he not have been still more unhappy? “She has not been unhappy,” he said, bitterly; but in spite of all she

had done he loved her, and he forgave her. And then he thought of Clemency and her sweetness; she would say he ought to be glad that Julie had not been unhappy. He bowed his head on his clasped hands. . . .

When he roused, the fire had burned low on the hearth, and he shivered, but it was not only with outward cold. As he had stood, thinking first of Clemency and her behaviour, then of Julie, then of himself and his own life, an awful sensation came to Esau.

He began to tremble from head to foot . . . and then a ray of soul-piercing light fell on the darkness he had been studying. It seemed to him that he saw a spectre—a spectre which rose solemnly beside him, and grew every minute more distinct; it was a revelation of his own soul.

More than once in all these years of

hardening he had heard a warning voice. Once Daniel Lister had asked him how he meant to answer at the Day of Judgment for all the years in which he had cut himself off from dealings with his fellows—from every chance of doing good, of showing love and kindly sympathy, of stretching out a helping hand to those in need. In this new light that was shining in upon his soul he saw what he had done instead; he had created unlove and distrust; he had caused evil speaking, and to the only being who, through all these sad, gloomy years, had shown him real love and devotion, he had been harsh and a tyrant—he had tried to blight her young life. He bent still lower over his still clasped hands. The remembrance that probed most deeply was Clemency's tender face. Then as he went on in thought Obadiah's words came back—

“You cannot mak’ t’ world to please you, nobbut God Almighty ’ill hev a share on’t,” the cripple had said; and even then a sharp warning voice had told Esau that there must be a limit to the exercise of his will.

While he sat before Clemency’s fire, some of these thoughts had come back, and he had then hardened himself against them. His mental sight was growing clearer and clearer. The room was dark, for the lamp sauk, and burned dimly, but a door had opened in Esau’s soul.

A long procession passed by him, clearly seen in the light now pouring in—it showed the story of his wasted life. He saw his own return from Italy, to his desolate home, and how he had taken his bright young sister to live with him, his silent sadness and his cynical want of sympathy with her girlish gaiety, he saw how he had alienated her by harshness

born of the selfish sorrow in which he lived; and—the accusation went on—as he saw her pass hand in hand with her gay young husband; he had forced her to seek a companion instead of becoming one to her. . . . Then had come years of self-absorbed wanderings not wholly sinless, and from these he turned with a sigh; though something told him that his dire unlove for his fellows had been a heavier sin than these. He had made his own will his master, he had lived his own life without even trying to live for others; how pitiful and small seemed the excuse as he stood looking at things in their naked reality! He had cut himself off from all love—from God and man too—because one weak girl had taken her love from him—had slighted him.

He stood a long while thinking, then he bent down to the fire, but it had gone

out. Beating upon the darkness came the weird strokes of the clock—one—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine. How long he had been standing there!

Esau shivered, then with an effort he went to his desk and sat down to write.

“Dear Glaisdale,” he wrote, “I must break my promise to you. I cannot give you my niece. It is painful to me to take this course, but it is the only one left open to me. I cannot make Clemency unhappy.

“Faithfully yours,

“ESAU RUNSWICK.”

The effort to write this had been very great to Esau Runswick, and after writing it, he leaned back in his chair, for he felt strangely tired.

Timothy came in and began to make up the fire, but Esau bade him leave it, the jarring noise disturbed him. . . Then came the sounds of barring and bolting and then silence, except for the weird ticking on the stairs.

The lamp sank lower still; the red logs had long ago been white, but though the room was very cold, the figure in the chair seemed not to heed it. . . . Once Esau Runswick looked round him, and then he went on thinking. . . It grew colder still—and then the lamp went out, and the darkness reigned supreme. . . .

There might have been sounds within the study, movement there had plainly been, but the members of the household slept on peacefully till waking time. They had not been disturbed. And yet some one had come to Hollow Mill in the early hours.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs and

voices in the kitchen before morning light struggled in through the thick curtains in the study. The morning light always came there before Lettice did, and it had the room to itself; but its entrance had been forestalled this morning.

A shadow had come and had departed, but it had not gone out alone—

No longer in the chair in which he had sat himself down—but kneeling against the table, his head bent on his clasped hands, was the empty form of the Master—at Rest.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST.

THE village of Askholme is astir; the church bells have been ringing joy peals since early morning, and there is a general expression of expectation and holiday-making on the faces of boys and men loitering near the gates, and along the avenue that leads to the high road.

Inside the Manor House there is also expectation, but this is not so demonstrative as it was last year at the Château de Foignies; then every one was crying and laughing for joy, from old Matthieu downwards; some of the younger servants

danced in their excitement. But at Askholme there is a solemn element, a stately fussiness, in which the usual pomposity of the old butler doubles itself.

But outside on the lawn, Madame de Kerjean looks radiant as she sits under her tent-umbrella. The Count de Foignies has just stopped his garden-chair, drawn by a yellow Iceland pony, so that he may chat with his daughter. He too looks very bright and happy.

“You are gay to-day my friend,” he says, and he looks admiringly at Madame de Kerjean’s creamy dress and the white hat, which makes her look years younger than she is. “I am so glad you have left off your black, Julie; bah, it is a colour I do not like, it saddens me.”

She smiles back at him; then she sighs.

“Our poor child will have had enough

to remind her of her loss," she says, "on her way here; I could not welcome her to her new home in mourning, papa."

"*Mon Dieu*," the old man says, "I am glad they are coming. It has been so sweet to have a daughter, that I am impatient to possess two—why did you not tell them to come direct from Kerjean to Askholme?"

"I never offer much advice to Ralph," says Julie—then she looks pensive. "It was natural she should wish to visit his grave," she says, "ah, that poor, dear Esau." She puts her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Bah!" the Count fidgets, "that was long ago, nearly a year. *Mon Dieu*," he looks teasingly at his daughter's grave face, "I see I shall have to send for La Roche Jagu to bring back your spirits."

Julie laughs and blushes and shakes her head.

“You will have plenty of amusement now,” she goes on; “I hear the carriage wheels already. You will have your new granddaughter.”

“Yes, yes,” he rubs his delicate withered hands. “Askholme will be like Paradise, I shall not care to leave it.”

“You must not make me jealous of Clemency,” Julie says, saucily.

The cheery old man snaps his fingers. “You could never be jealous, my Julie, you could not take the trouble. Aha, I am richer than you are, my angel, I have three children, and you have only two.”

“But I have a father;” and she trips up to the chair and kisses first one and then the other of his withered cheeks.

“Will those two have quarrelled by this time, do you think?” he says, mischievously, “these *grandes passions* do not wear well, eh, my Julie?”

She looks down at the rug spread over the grass.

“I cannot tell,” she answers, “Clemency is not like other girls I have known; it is perhaps because she has been brought up out of the world, and Ralph—no papa, Ralph—would never quarrel with his wife; he might reprove, but he is too wise and too tender to quarrel. . . . But there they are.”

The Count's chair is turned so that he can see the entrance gates, and, as a carriage drives in, a noisy shout of welcome rises, and the bells ring out more merrily than ever.

Madame de Kerjean goes forward, and in a moment she is in her son's arms. Then she extricates herself, and

kisses Clemency, looking with contented admiration at the sweet, agitated face.

“Come to your grandfather, my child,” she says lovingly, and leads her up to the old man; “he is impatient to see you.”

Monsieur de Foignies is indeed eager with impatience. He has hurried over his greeting to Ralph, and he kisses the young wife on both her blushing cheeks.

“*Mon Dieu !*” he looks slyly at Ralph, “the young people are sometimes wise in their choice after all.” Then he takes another long look at Clemency, “No, they will not quarrel these two; they are matched as well as married.”

Clemency gives him a bright glance; this cheerful old man fascinates her.

“But we must quarrel a little, must

we not," she says, "for the sake of variety?"

"She is charming," the old man says to himself. "When you want variety, my sweet child, come to me; you are much too good and too pretty for that grandson of mine, and I am years younger than he is."

"She is lovely," he says presently to his daughter, when Ralph takes his wife down to the lake; "I am not surprised that the Englishman wanted to carry her off from Ralph, it must have been hard to give her up when she was promised to him, poor fellow."

"But he is consoled already," says Julie, smiling; "did I not tell you that I heard of his marriage in Florence the other day. He has married an Italian lady, a beautiful widow."

“And widows are charming, are they not, my friend?” He looks admiringly at his daughter.

Meantime the lovers have wandered on past the lake till they reach a little glen, through which the water finds its way, and nature has been left to itself. Here king ferns and sedges are luxuriant, and some huge wild parsnips are rampant over a jungle of vegetation shaded by tall trees.

Two months have gone by since Ralph and Clemency were married at Askholme, and since then they have been travelling in Italy. Lately they have visited the Château de Kerjean, but when they reached England, Clemency asked to go straight to Abbeytown, so that she might visit her uncle's grave, and see Miss Phœbe. Her husband's love had weaned the girl from her sadness, but it was a great comfort to talk of Uncle Esau to

one who loved him as Miss Phœbe did. It had renewed Clemency's sorrow, but there was no bitterness in it; and to-day she was able to share her husband's delight in his return to Askholme. Ralph was deeply gratified with the delight she showed as they rambled through the grounds.

"I could not have dreamed of anything so perfect," the girl said; "are you not glad that at first I thought you were a poor artist?" she said, slyly.

He looked fondly at her.

"It would have made no difference to your love, darling; there are women who marry for houses and land, and there are women who marry their husbands only. If you had cared for all this you would have taken Glaisdale."

Clemency looked saucily at him.

“Do you think so? Perhaps I might if you had not come to Baxdale. I believe to please dear uncle I would have done anything if I had only been free.”

Ralph shook his head.

“You would not have done that, though I deserved to lose you, and I am not sure that your uncle would have wished it at last. If he had not had that feeling against me he could not really have liked Glaisdale, his taste was too refined.”

Clemency sighed.

“I often think,” she said, “that I had only just begun to understand Uncle Esau when I lost him.”

Ralph looked fondly at her.

“You are a good lover,” he said; “well, so was he—‘faithful unto death.’ You should hear my grandfather talk of him.”

Clemency clasped both her hands round her husband's arm and raised her tender, true eyes to his.

“It is curious,” she said, “but if uncle Esau had had a son he would have been like you, my Ralph.”

THE END.

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